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#### **Dedication**

This **Book of the Fallen** is dedicated, with much gratitude, to Sandra Swan, Inky Grrl, Jacqueline Bryk, my courageous brain-trust, and the many friends and fans who've helped me during the long and often painful gestation of this project.

Thank you also to Rich Thomas and Matthew Dawkins, for understanding why this book took as long as it has and for helping me get it back up to speed.

Although they did not survive to see this book's completion, Raven Bond and Coyote Ashley Ward provided a significant part of its DNA. Raven, in particular, helped me puzzle my way through the emotional and metaphysical challenges involved, providing wise guidance and an educated understanding of the thornier aspects of this book and its contents. I miss them both deeply, and they've been a constant presence throughout the book's creation.

Shortly before this book's completion, our friend Ember Johnston Nannydotter was killed in a car crash. Ember was a creative luminary in our Seattle community and a ferocious voice for justice and transformation. Their sudden and unfore-seeable death underscores the need for all of us to appreciate one another while we can, and to live lives that make our world a better place long after we're no longer physical parts of it. Thank you, Ember, for the beauty you shared and the spirit you revealed through your arts.

Thanks go out as well to Francesca Gentille, my longtime friend and long-ago sweetheart, who taught me a lot about healing, descent, the Jungian shadow, and the treasures we might find in the Underworld. Thank you, love. This book holds a part of you as well.

And though I won't refer to them by name, certain people have inspired this book by living out examples of what Nephandi can be like. I hope you left less of a mark on the world in general than you left on me back then.





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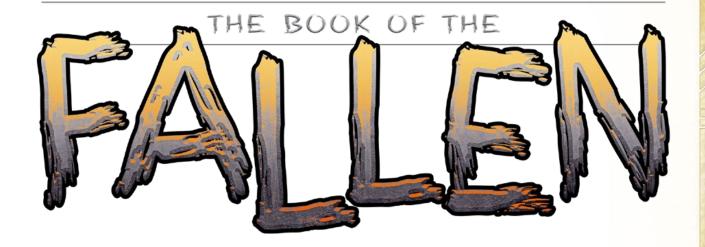
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# Content Warning

This book deals explicitly with abusive people, activities, and cultures. Not to glorify them but to expose them.

This book features graphic depictions and discussions involving abuse of children and adults, trauma, war, bigotry, blasphemy, torture, human trafficking, sexual violation, and other forms of human malignancy.

This is your chance to turn back now.

Things only get worse from here, and while we handle such subject matter with maturity and sensitivity, we strongly encourage readers to consider their limits before going forward.

**AUTHOR'S PREFACE** 

# Evil is Not a Toy

The world must tremble upon learning of the crimes we have committed. Men must be made to blush and feel ashamed as belonging to the same species we do. I demand that a monument be raised to commemorate this crime and signal it to the whole world and that our names should be graven upon it by our own hands.

- Saint-Fond, from Juliette, by the Marquis de Sade

I promised long ago that I would never release a **Players Guide to Nephandi**. This isn't one.

Here's why.

One of my earliest memories involves my fascination with a pretty tile on our kitchen counter. When I asked my mother what it was for, she did something I couldn't see, took me by the hand, lifted me up, and held my hand to the plate.

It was a ceramic hot plate. I was three or four years old.

When I screamed and pulled my hand away from her, Mom said, with chilling calm, "Now you know why you should never, ever touch that plate."

I love my mom, but that was a fucked-up thing to do to a toddler. She meant well, I guess, and she says she doesn't remember it now. I do, though. I can't forget it.

About five years later, my family lived next door to a family called the Dunlaps. My sister and I were good friends with their kids. Some evenings, though, we would sit at the dinner table and listen to screams and smashing sounds coming through our townhouse wall. A few times, my father went over to have a word with Mr. Dunlap. Most nights, we would sit around the table and pretend not to hear the guy beating the shit out of his wife and kids. Like I said, their daughter and I were friends. One day, we were messing around with a tape recorder and she made some "jokes" that, in hindsight, strongly implied that her father was molesting her as well as beating her. Such a thought was totally alien to me when I was eight. I no longer have those tapes, and I'm really glad I can't hear them with my middle-aged ears. The memories are bad enough.

My childhood friend's older sister spent some time in juvie. When I was around 11 years old, I asked her why. She told me how she and another girl and had been angry at a classmate of theirs. And so, they held the girl down, pulled up her skirt, and poured bleach into her vagina. The sister laughed when she told me this. I realize now she was a literal psychopath. Last I knew, she was in prison. I never found out why, and I'm glad not to know.

In college, one of my best friends, his then-girlfriend, and a mutual friend of ours spent a summer living in a cabin with a charismatic dude who thought of himself as a budding Aleister Crowley. I don't know the details, but I know that summer involved grave-robbing, group sex, prodigious amounts of drugs, and a systemic program of psychological, physical, and sexual abuse. My friend did not speak for nearly six months after he came home, and his former personality was shattered. His girlfriend disappeared soon after they returned. The mutual friend later beat his own girlfriend into unconsciousness, came after her children (who locked themselves in the bedroom and called the cops), abducted her mother, and forced her to drive him out of the city at knifepoint. He's now in prison too. I have no idea what happened to the guy who was behind all this...but I suspect he's still out there somewhere, and I'm sure he's done this to other people.

In a shitty apartment complex my now ex-wife dubbed Domestic Abuse Central, we got to listen to drunk fathers and drugged mothers beating their children, each other, and anyone else unfortunate enough to be within reach. I wound up in a lot of brawls back then, and I was lucky to escape that situation without being arrested, seriously injured or killed. That same period saw another friend choked out by a boyfriend who tried to rape her, traded for drugs by a girlfriend, and stalked by both parties. Later, the ex-boyfriend tried to run her over with his car, and the ex-girlfriend threatened to burn down our building after the friend moved in with us...something one of our neighbors almost did one night when he had a psychotic break and set fire to his apartment. His next-door neighbor was beaten into a coma by some pals with a baseball bat, another neighbor was shot and killed by his wife's boyfriend, and our upstairs neighbor beat and raped a woman he'd brought home from a bar. We had him locked up, but her screams that day were not something you can ever forget.

There's more...so much more: the "tough love rehab" where my non-druggie girlfriend was tortured for four months and her brother was driven to slow-motion suicide; a similar camp where my sister was beaten and sexually abused by the "counselors" in charge, and where her roommate committed suicide with a piece of glass; the atrocities I learned about in my time with Amnesty International and as a political activist for almost 40 years; the woman slammed through a plate-glass window by "pro-life" demonstrators during a showdown outside a women's clinic in Washington, DC; the former gaming buddy who got caught renting a friend's child out for sex on the internet. If I wrote about all the shit I've witnessed just in my own life, the results would seem impossible to believe. But I lived them. They were real.

Evil, too, is real.

I'm not talking about painted Satans and otherworldly conspiracies. I mean the horrific things that go on right next door. Sometimes, we pretend to not to see them. Sometimes we try to stop them. Most often, we don't even know about them. And so, to many of us, evil become a joke. Worse still, it seems cool. Fun. Desirable.

This book is personal. Personal in the sense that it's rooted in real-life experiences and observations, and personal in that I, as the author, employ a more direct voice than usual throughout this book.

Why? Because horror is personal. Evil is personal. Abuse and the triumph over it are personal, and so rendering those things in a blandly impersonal way robs them of impact and importance. To truly understand the Fallen and their effect on our fictional World of Darkness, I feel it's necessary to bring you, the audience, eye to eye with the real-life fallout from the metaphorical evils the Nephandi represent.

Personally, I faced evil in the hallway of an apartment building where a drunk ex-Marine with bloody fists justified beating a woman so badly the cops had to carry her out on a stretcher. I saw it in the eyes of a mob with tire irons and at least one knife, who closed in on me when they thought I was a drug addict. Sure, I've read books and seen movies, but the evilest things I can imagine came through in the jokes of my childhood friends and the laughter of a teenage kid who gang-raped a girl with bleach.

Evil is not a toy.

It's the kid up your block who dresses like a ninja and brags about how he plans to break into girl's rooms and attack them and then cut their throats. It's the boyfriend of your sister who says he'll assault your girlfriend just for fun, then holds you down and beats your ass just to show you that you can't stop him from doing it. This isn't four-color evil, and if you're looking for a little comfort-food sadism then put this book down and go look elsewhere.

Evil *can* be sexy. It can be cool. It's often powerful because any and every tactic, to evil, is fair game.

But it doesn't look like bug-eyed monsters. It looks like us.

It lives in a mother's good intentions and a father's drunken force. And then it walks down the streets alongside us, and only when it jumps out at us do we even know it's there.

That's why I wrote this book.

That's where this comes from.

That's why there's not a character sheet at the end of this book. I can't stop you from playing a Fallen mage if you choose, but I'm not going to encourage you to do so.

This book is not a player's guide for fictional monstrosities.

It's a warning about real monsters who are already here.



# Introduction: Eaters of the Weak

Compassion is the vice of kings: stamp down the wretched & the weak: this is the law of the strong.

— Aleister Crowley, *The Book of the Law* 

You are prey.

Prey to the gods, to mortality, to your own weakness. Prey for the Eaters of the Weak.

And you don't even know that yet.

But you will.

"Nephandi," people call them. Raving idiots in black robes chanting blasphemous hymns to Otherworldly masters. Some say they were exiled. Or purged. Or nothing to worry about at all. They're just goons with a fixation on death metal, cutting up kitty cats in homage to ludicrous ideas.

Suckers.

That's exactly what they want you to think.

Your ignorance makes them wise. Your hatred makes them strong. Your fear of everything and everyone around you cuts you off from the herd and serves you up on a paper plate, one more meal for aspiring gods.

You expect you'll see them coming. You assume you're immune. You figure there's nothing they can say or do that will turn you from your righteous path.

And you are deeply fucking wrong.

The Eaters of the Weak are here. Among us. Possibly right next to you. They're your sweethearts. They're your mentors. They're your parents, your friends and neighbors, your reflection.

Those folks might not be initiated Nephandi. You might not have gone through the Cauls yourself. But trust me, and hear my words: You're doing exactly what they want you to do.

They're winning, is my point.

This is the Fallen Age, and we're all on the menu.

Wake up or be consumed.

# <u>Trolling the Void</u>

To the uninitiated, the mages referred to as *Nephandi* are blood-drenched tentacle-fetishists, worshipping distant gods of chaos and destruction. According to some accounts, they were driven out beyond the Horizon sometime between the mid-20th century and the early 21st. Rumors of an "Avatar Storm" (which, in your chronicle, may or may not have occurred) place

the Fallen out among the stars, their unquenchable evil living out an H. P. Lovecraft fever dream. Still other rumors put them in charge of everything from 4chan to the Technocratic Inner Circle. Gibbering through the deepest shadows of the World of Darkness, they grow horns and gut whatever virgins they can find. These metaphysical serial killers boast a shoot-on-sight status

among every other Awakened group. Even the Mad despise the Fallen, and these rampaging demon-fuckers embody the flipside of Ascension: an ideal devoted to eternal ending of all things.

So, who *are* the Fallen, anyway? Behind the caricatured façade they use to misdirect their reality-bending rivals, who *are* these people whose devotion to malignancy might potentially end the world as we know it and usher in oblivion?

The sad fact is they're people just like us.

Oh, sure — some of them *do* hack up vagrants and bathe themselves in blood. The extravagantly stupid ones paint targets on themselves by trying to act out Cannibal Corpse album covers, and the most metaphysically charged Nephandi grow too bizarre to survive long in earth's Consensus Reality. Those are the Nephandi people see.

The most accomplished Eaters of the Weak, however, are the ones you *don't* see unless you know what to look for: The ones running companies and cults, pulling political strings, setting virtual warfare in motion, and simply getting us to hate each other just a little bit more than we already do.

That's what makes them so damn dangerous: Not wild magicks (though they command some) or Lovecraftian beasties (though they have a few of those as well), but the fact that they understand us all so damned well. Humanity is a disease in love with its own reflection, and the Fallen know this to be true.

People like to think that evil is the Other, a snarling face of barbarism stamped across the features of the alien. But evil, in fact, looks like us. Is us, when we put aside our empathy. We'll talk more about evil soon enough, but for now just realize that people suck and the Nephandi excel at convincing us to suck even worse.

Such evil is a human prerogative. It's as close as your reflection and as vivid as the comments section on any website you can name. We are the ultimate invasive species, cloaking our condition under projections and myths that, gods forbid, look nothing like us, oh no. We seek out evil in *them* and *those people*, chasing the truth before us with a prayer. The true evil, though, is in us all along. The more we deny it, the stronger it grows.

Humanity prospers in spite of itself. Man's natural predator is other humans. When we combine our efforts, we create miraculous horrors and horrific miracles. Human history is written in blood. The end of our species, most likely, will not come by way of angry gods or an exploding star but by mankind putting a gun in its mouth and firing just because we *can*.

It's a precious gravity that holds our world intact — a hope for a better future and a determination to bring that future about. The driving force of Mage's Ascension War derives from an ideal that we can rise above our self-destructive urges and become the angels we always dreamed we might be. The fault lines in that dream come from selfish blindness, the lure of power, and the traumas that bind us to our private pain. When stressed, we often break apart. Dreams shatter. Despair pours in. Ideals become fanaticism. The center, as Yeats said, cannot hold, and that precious gravity instead becomes an undertow.

# Sociopathy Chic vs. Clinical Sociopathy

Are Nephandi sociopaths? No. Clinical sociopathy — detailed further in Chapter Two — is an involuntary mental condition. The Fallen behave callously but that behavior is a conscious choice, not a neurological condition.

Throughout this book, however, we'll use the term "sociopathy chic" to describe behavior that mocks and demolishes empathy. In this context, we're referring to choices of philosophy and behavior, not to the neurological condition known variously as psychopathy, sociopathy, or ASPD (Antisocial Personality Disorder).

A few passages refer to "clinical sociopathy." In this book, that term reflects a person who does have that internal lack of empathy but may or may not choose to behave like the proverbial psychopath. That lack of empathy does not itself make a person into a monster, and plenty of human monsters have an innate sense of empathy but choose not to use it.

The distinction between clinical and chic, in this book, divides people who have a condition they cannot control from folks who choose to toss empathy out the window for fun, profit, and fashion's sake. A politician who guts environmental protections and waves away the human cost indulges in sociopathy chic — he might have the clinical condition, or he might not, but in either case he acts with disregard for the effects of his action on other people.

For more about the clinical condition, see "Psychopath, Sociopath, Narcissist or Fallen?" on page XX.

Nephandi personify a metaphysical gravity well, drawing everything toward ultimate annihilation. A malignant mass feeding on human frailties, they pull in everything they touch. Where other mages seek to exalt humanity, the Fallen help us to debase ourselves.

We're doomed. They know it. And they want us to know it, too.

Oh, they'll seek personal power, sure. Many aspire to godhood of a sort, stepping outside the human rat-race and seizing power through cosmic transcendence. Their dark enlightenment, however, involves a predatory glee in humanity's extinction. There is no "better tomorrow" for us — that's a lie. Instead, there's a gaping, voracious *now* that exists in the space between self-delusion and self-destruction. That void is the beginning of all things, and likewise is its end.

The Nephandic endgame is not a CGI monster-fest in which titanic elder gods break through and stage an orgy of madness across the earth. It's much simpler than that: They want to destroy hope, gut compassion, feed on our future, and

make us love them for it. They're the hidden ringmasters of global extinction, laughing as we make our world burn. They turn extremity into virtue and empathy to ash. For them, the war for reality is won when we hate ourselves and one another so badly that no better reality is possible. Their aim, ultimately, involves killing hope itself. Kill hope, and you kill the future. That's when the lights go out for good.

The Traditions, Technocracy, and Crafts, despite their many flaws, strive toward the common good. The Nephandi don't bother. To them, there is no "common good." In its place is a continued state of subjugation of the weak by the strong under pretenses of justice. The only good worth striving for is individual Descent: The state of ultimate Enlightenment gained through wandering the Abyss and coming out the other side as a newly elevated god. Like all ideals, of course, this state of godhood may itself be just one further state of delusion — a pretty thing to strive for but ultimately yet another prison. The only true surety is that this Fallen world is damned. And so, though Nephandi might quest toward an ideal of dark transcendence, they know in a practical sense that we're all fucked anyway and so they might as well have a great time while they can before the lights go out forever.

Reality Check

The Book of the Fallen is not a simple gaming sourcebook. It's an exploration of human atrocity, a de-glamorization of evil that seems too often glamorous. Its words and sentiments are often racist, sexist, homophobic, sadistic, greedy, vain, treacherous, vile, and altogether repugnant to me. Those words should in no way be construed as the honest sentiments of the authors. This

is not a player's guide; in intention, at the very least, it's very much the opposite of that.

By the same token, it's no mere monster manual, filled with spooky enemies to kill. Evil is complex, and those dedicated to it are even more so.

The Fallen are, of course, fictional. There isn't *actually* a conspiracy or six rewriting reality behind the scenes.

Or is there?

Especially when you're dealing with a fictional game about metaphysical reality wars, it's sometimes hard to realize where fiction ends, and reality begins.

The book in your hands features real-life evils: abuse culture, human trafficking, callousness as a fashion statement, and far, far worse conducted not by shadowy maleficeans but by people you might like, respect, or even love. Although there aren't really cabals of reality-warping mages dictating the fate of humankind, the realities described in this book run deeper than cardboard Satanists and their facile rituals.

The Nephandi personify what's worst about ourselves.

Abuse and violence are innate elements of the human condition... perhaps even of life on earth, and certainly of life as we know it. Given the current state of upheaval, though, we *are* – in real life – at a point of crisis in the human experiment. **Mage** in general, and the Fallen in particular, are reflections of that crisis in this age. On both an intimate and an epic scale, this book shows how we really *are* being abused by people who profit from our fear, and how we might, in fact, become those people, too.

Mage's "battle for reality" is fictional, yet also real.



Introduction: Eaters of the Weak

# Themes: Predation, Abuse, Horror, Evil, and Compassion



Fuck you, suckers — I've got mine! Although the average Nephandus can weave esoteric explanations for the philosophies that drive them (see the Paradigms explored in Chapter Five), the core of the Fallen Path can be summed up simply: You're either predators or prey. The Fallen prefer the former role, thank you very much.

As unapologetic predators of the mortal and metaphysical worlds, the Fallen represent that selfish urge to excel at the cost of others,

if only because otherwise someone else will excel at cost to you. And so, the themes of this book involve the malevolent tactics used by predators, the horrors of imminent mortality and human cruelty, and the compassion the Fallen forsake, even though it's the cornerstone of human survival.

## **Predation**

Eat or be eaten is a core ethos for Fallen folk. Everyone's on the menu, really, but some folks have a better spot at the table and so they treat the rest of their world as meat and drink at the banquet of the gods. Vampires and shapeshifters are predators, certainly, with infernal spirits and malevolent aliens dwarfing such entities in power and hunger alike. Humans, by such epic standards, are cattle; Kindred even refer to them as "kine." Mages are a different breed, however, and Nephandi are the apex predators among them.

The Nephandic Path toward their vision of Ascension is carved from the bones of their prey and enemies. Essentially a pursuit of self-godhood, it posits a metaphysical arms-race in which the only meaningful end is the domination of others for the glory of the self. Certain Fallen may place their faith in even greater predators, tossing their lot in with demons and gods who they believe (perhaps rightly) are poised on the edge of devouring our world; others seek ultimate transcendence through the assumption of divinity by essentially eating a god and taking his place.

Regardless of their personal beliefs, Nephandi are predators, one and all. In the ancient tongue of Bhât, the mythic Eden of earthly domination, their name means "the Eaters of the Weak," and they take that title seriously.

# Abuse, Metaphor and Reality

For predators and prey alike, the most common tool of domination involves abusing another party in order to gain control over them. Such abuse can be as blatant as a slap across the face, or as subtle as pervasive love-bombing aimed at isolating a person from outside influence. Nephandi excel at a wide spectrum of abusive techniques, using the ones that seem most effective for the job at hand. Thus, the Fallen can seem like generous friends and kindly lovers — the most awesome folks you'd ever want to meet...until the moment you seem to be slipping the leash of their control, at which point anything goes.

The Book of the Fallen presents an ugly metaphor of abuse on an intimate yet cosmic scale. But it also provides a toolkit for dealing with abuse. In the face of all that's going down in the world, a game about reality-wizards might feel absurd.

But yet...

Hope is fundamentally absurd. So much so that, to the Fallen, hope is a lie that needs to be purged.

That's what abusers do: They try to crush hope.

It's all about power. Who has it, who doesn't, how we claim it, and what we do with it. And because so much of **Mage** is about power, certain mages believe that the ultimate power involves destroying hope.

#### What is Abuse?

What do we mean here by *abuse*? A systemic pattern of dependence, isolation, exploitation, threats, damage and fear.

Fictional Nephandi perpetrate abuse because they believe they have the right to do so, because it profits them to do so, and because it's fun to do so. Real-life abusers aren't nearly as obvious about their motives and nature, and they tend to abuse people out of a sense of their own fears about weakness and vulnerability. That said, some people really *do* enjoy hurting other people, make their livings by hurting other people, feel justified about hurting other people, and — in the case of mental illness, inculturation, or similar conditions — might not even *realize* they're hurting other people. Secretive as they are, the fictional Nephandi tend to be more obvious and intentional about the abuses they commit. Real-life abusers often aren't as overtly evil as the Fallen, but that doesn't make the damage they inflict any less painful to the people on the wrong side of it.

In real life, we're surrounded by abusers and abuse, and some people make excuses for such behavior" "He's just angry," "she's just scared," "once you get to know them, you'll understand why they act that way." Abusers get voted into power. People might give them money, love, and faith. The cycle of abuse runs so deep and strong that despite loathing abuse, we might find ourselves carrying it out.

Mages, too, can be abusers. The Fallen excel at such things, but they're not the only ones who do it. The Technocracy is abusive in the name of "the greater good," and behind their castles-and-unicorns ideals the Traditions have an appalling

history of abuse as well. The Crafts tend to be forged by abuse, so their members often pass abuse along to anyone who gets in their way. Marauders may provide the ultimate example of people who've been abused so badly that they can't recognize the damage they inflict upon others as abuse. The Nephandi, though — and this point is vital — *choose* to abuse. Predation is essential to their concept of Ascension, and their ideal involves abusing everybody else in the universe, forever.

Yes, Nephandi are often victims of abuse themselves, but that element of choice marks the Fallen as the ultimate perpetrators of abuse.

### Techniques of Abuse

Nephandi, like abusers in the real world, use the following techniques (detailed further in Chapter Two):

- Shower the target with affection, to buy that target's trust.
- Lie about what they're doing, to conceal the abuser's flaws and motives.
- Point in someone else's direction, to distract the abused party and get them angry at someone other than the abuser.
- Promise great things, to keep the target craving more attention.
- Isolate the target, to reconstruct the reality the abuser wants to enforce.
- Undercut the target's sense of reality and self, to establish control "for your own good."
- Blame the target and exercise "discipline," in order to show the abused party who's boss.
- Threaten severe consequences, so the abused party will fear losing the abuser's favor.
- Explode (the part people finally recognize as abuse).
- Repent, apologize, and reconcile, to keep the abused party close.
- Repeat these techniques, as often as the abuser can get away with repeating them.

That explosion might be emotional, social, financial, physical, even — in the case of religious and metaphysical communities — spiritual. Whatever form it takes, the explosion is punishment aimed at hurting the target as much and as badly as possible at the time.

The "apology and reconciliation" technique covertly blames the abused party for the explosion ("You made me do it... if you would just stop doing that...") while taking a superficial amount of blame that's still manipulative as hell ("I can't help it -I just love you so much...").

An experienced abuser varies those techniques in whichever order appears to work best for a particular target. Most real-world abusers, like the fictional Nephandi, have honed these techniques in advance, and realize which techniques work best on you before you even realize they're manipulating you.

This Cycle of Abuse is further detailed in Chapter Seven, pp. XX. For now, just realize the most vital step to escaping abuse is to see it for what it is.

### Breaking the Power of Abuse

Mage is a game about transforming reality.

The Fallen are metaphors for abusive people and techniques.

And this book is about recognizing, escaping, and moving beyond abuse.

How can we *do* that, then? Faced with people — imaginary or otherwise — who excel at remaking realities with their victims on the bottom and them on the top, how can people overcome that situation and transform their reality into one where hope is possible? There's no single answer to that question, because so much depends upon personal circumstances. The following tactics, though, can help:

- Recognize what's going on: Abusers thrive on misdirection, excuses, and blaming other people especially the people they're abusing for the problem. The first step, then, involves realizing the cool person you thought you knew is a façade hiding someone who thinks abusing people is okay, maybe even justified. Yeah, no fuck that shit. Read up on abuse, if you can, or talk to people familiar with abuse and recovery. If the stuff you hear seems familiar, you're probably being abused.
- Refuse to be Blamed: Abusers blame their targets for the things they do. While it's important to recognize one's own flaws, abusers exaggerate those flaws or blame the flaws on "those people" in order to keep their targets focused on hating themselves or other parties. Because abusers and the Nephandi are very good at this part present themselves as someone the abused party needs, it's often hard to see the game when you're in the middle of it. That's especially true for folks who had low self-esteem before the abuser even showed up. Abusers target desperate, insecure people, though, and so a major step in overcoming abuse involves refusing to bear the blame for things the abuser chooses to do.
- Recognize Your Worth: No matter what an abuser tells you, you do not deserve to be abused. Everyone has an awesome quality or two. Use them. Draw strength from them. Start from there, see what other qualities you possess (if possible, ask someone else to help you get perspective), and see yourself as you are, not as your abuser tells you you are.



- Set and Maintain Boundaries: Abusers strive to control reality for other people. Setting boundaries, regarding what you will and will not put up with, takes control of your reality back from the abuser. They probably won't like that. Tough. It is your right to set boundaries regarding your body, emotions, physical and financial safety, and so forth. While legal exceptions exist for minors and incapacitated adults exceptions that non-abusers will not exploit in order to abuse you you are the ultimate authority about your boundaries. Recognize it, enforce it, enjoy the autonomy, and if the abusive party cannot accept those boundaries, then...
- Realize You Have Options: Abusers isolate their targets and tell them they have no options. Unless a person is a child, an invalid, or in actual captivity and sometimes even then escape options exist. Depending on circumstances, those options can include:
  - ♦ Domestic violence shelters and advocate groups, assuming some exist in your area.
  - Friends or family (who are not friendly with the abuser).
  - ♦ Legal authorities, if you feel they can be trusted.
  - Leaving your relationship, job, home, neighborhood, or social circle.

Escape won't be easy, but if you can contact someone else to help you form and execute an escape plan, those options exist. If you can't currently contact someone, look for an opportunity to do so.

• **Get Out:** If at all possible, get out. If it's *not* possible, then plan for potential escapes, and use those plans

as soon as possible. If the abuser has displayed a potential for violence, then get as far from that party as possible and put as many layers of protection as you can between the abuser and yourself.

Whatever the circumstances might be, remember: Abuse is not your fault, and you do not deserve to be abused.

#### Horror

So... what scares you? Is it pain? Rejection? Betrayal? Perhaps the fear that *those* people (whomever "*those* people" happen to be) are stealing your world right out from under you? Do you fear loss? Damnation? A failure of control? Whatever it is, fear becomes a weapon in the hands of Nephandi. That which you fear, they employ. Not because they're boo-scary devil-people, but because fear is the greatest method of control.

Fear galvanizes the human animal. It snaps us to attention in ways no other impulse can. The rush of chemicals and neurological connections sharpens senses and focuses every element of our minds and bodies upon survival. In excess, it can paralyze us too, either by locking us into a state of shock or by sweeping us into an irrational and often addictive haze. Too much fear becomes a drug — lulling us into a stupor, distracting us from every other thing, and hooking us on the burst of fight-or-flight miasma until we're like rats in an electrified cage, shitting ourselves with conflicting urges of sensation and escape.

Fear can, in the right hands, become a form of enlightenment. More commonly, however, it's a tool of command. Scared people obey those who promise action. We look for targets of our rage, because a good punch in someone else's face seems like strength when we're afraid. If somebody points that face out to us, and

then promises us a chance to punch it in, many people do just that. Terror, therefore, provokes desire—the thrill of stimulation and the potential to strike back at the things we think we fear.

For those who follow the Nephandic Path, fear unlocks the doorway to fearlessness. By making a friend of horror, the Fallen strive to toss aside their own mortality. Meanwhile, they command the tools prepared by other people's fears—and then, through those tools, elevate themselves above the masses they use as sustenance for potential godhood. Fear, then, is the path to self-divinity... a state achieved by feeding on the fears of lesser mortals while laughing at the heat-death of the universe.

So, again – what scares you?

The Fallen probably know that answer better than you do.

And if you don't already fear them, then it's probably time to start.

#### Evil

Anyone can *commit* evil. The Fallen *embrace* evil. What, though, is "evil?" Modernist and postmodern philosophies claim there's no such thing, while religious theologies claim that many things outside their purview are innately evil. What does the word even *mean* anymore? That's a complicated subject we'll explore further in this book. For now, let's just say that intentional malignancy is a defining characteristic of Nephandic identity... not the facile alien evil of cartoonish villains but the pervasive evil that remains an inescapable element of human existence.

### Compassion

"Neither heaven nor earth is humane," states the *Tao Te Ching*. "They regard all things as straw-dog offerings. Nor is the sage humane. He regards all things as straw-dog offerings." Taken literally, this passage, and others like it, appears to sanction callous enlightenment. Why should a master shed tears for the servant's plight? What value is the smartest worm if it lies in the path of a master's feet? Mages, whose regard for "sleepers" and "the masses" often extend only so far as it takes to see if anybody's watching when they throw a fireball, aren't usually as compassionate as they'd like to think they are. For Nephandic mages, compassion is a weakness, and all weakness must be purged.

Enlightenment without compassion can attain an awful cruelty. Hermetic slave-owners, Etherite bio-tinkerers, Thanatoic assassins... such monsters make vampires cringe. The certainty of Awakened power tends to blind mages to the effects their actions have on other people. Aw, gee — another gas-main explosion? Who cares about the folks who lost their homes, that kid with third-degree burns, the firefighters who risk their lives to put out the blaze? That damn HIT Mark had it coming, and everyone else is collateral damage for my Ascension... right?

Imagine, then, how cruel a mage can be when that person has *deliberately* killed compassion in his heart. What he might be capable of with the power of the Spheres and no conscience about using it. Compassion is the failsafe switch of social animals, and a mage without it becomes the most awful sort of fiend.

Does such a fiend *deserve* compassion? Should other mages regard him as a potential subject for reform? If a person (mage or otherwise) treasures compassion, then should we then have sympathy even for *these* devils?

If you were looking for easy answers, you've come to the wrong place.

## How to Use This Book

- Author's Preface: Evil is Not a Toy presents the primary author's intent behind this book. It's kind of unusual, but for a book with this much volatile content we wanted to be clear about a lot of things right off the bat.
- Introduction: Eaters of the Weak lays the groundwork for this book and its material.
- Chapter One: The Awful Truth features a Fallen's-eye view of why they are who they are and why they do the things they do.
- Chapter Two: The Road to Leviathan traces the Nephandic Path, its elements, its motivations, and the techniques the Fallen use to get what they want from the world around them.
- Chapter Three: But Darkness Visible reveals the hidden factions within the Fallen ranks.
- Chapter Four: Dark Tree of Knowledge explores the esoteric side of the Nephandic Arts, including the Nightside, the Qlippoth, and the Fallen ideal of the *Black Diamond*: a form of Nephandic personal Ascension.
- Chapter Five: And All the Powers of Hell lays out demonic pacts and Investments, the focus (paradigms, practices, and instruments) for Nephandic Arts, exclusive Merits and Flaws, and an array of spells, books, and other malign paraphernalia.
- Chapter Six: Your Friends and Neighbors introduces a handful of the Fallen, with several organizations and infernal beasts employed within Nephandic ranks.
- Chapter Seven: Theatre of Cruelty presents Storyteller guidance for using the Fallen in your chronicle, including advice for running extreme material and metaplot options for Nephandic elements in your Mage chronicle.
- Afterword: Not on My Watch wraps things up on an encouraging note. Hope, after all, beats despair any day.

## All Hope Abandon?

Filled as it is with cool critters and dark-magick rules, this sourcebook explores ways in which many people are, in real life, being used and abused. In life as in the game, people are working

to destroy hope and define reality in their image. We might lack the powers of the Spheres but we can still use such knowledge to keep from being victimized.

Despite the fictional nature of the Fallen, the tactics described in the following chapters are used each day to deceive us, break us, pit us against each other, and perhaps ultimately destroy us. If parts of this book cut close to home, then look close at what's going on in that home. **Mage** *is* a game, true, but it has always been intended to be more than simple entertainment. From its inception, **Mage** has been a metaphor for stuff that's really going on, and there truly *is* a battle going on to determine the reality of our species, our planet, and our selves.

Underneath the people we choose to be, there's a darker

shadow we suppress. It's in all of us, no matter how gentle or righteous we might wish to be. It might take different forms and hold different views, but our forbidden self is always there. It's nasty and it's cruel and it sometimes gets the better of us even when we see ourselves as heroes. Our task, then, in gaming and in life, is to be better than that — to "do the right thing" and embrace the better angels of our nature.

The Fallen refuse to do that, though. For them, evil is transcendent virtue. Our light is their shadow, and they aim to smother it and turn all Creation into ash.

This book is not for everyone, and you may want to bail out now.

# Nephandic Lexicon

**Absolute, the:** The Void at the beginning and end of all things, whose violation by Light provided the origin of suffering. Ideally, Nephandi wish to return all things to the Absolute.

Abyss, the: Unfathomable depth, with many potential meanings: 1) The Deep Umbra; 2) the ultimate extent of the Nightside; 3) the Void; 4) *Daath*, which provides both the entrance to the Qlippoth via the Cauls, and also reflects a crisis of courage and confidence that separates the first seven Qlippoth from the final three.

**Abyssal Essences:** The state of an Avatar that has been infused with Qlippothic energies thanks to passing through the Cauls or reincarnating from a Nephandic past life. The four Abyssal Essences are: Chaotic (Primordial), Destructive (Dynamic), Frozen (Static), Tormented (Questing). (See widderslainte.)

**Aghora:** An approach to Tantra and yoga of the Left-Hand Path.

**Aghori:** A person who pursues Aghora. Often considered heretical and dangerous. From Sanskrit, "unterrified."

**Alphaing:** A practice of social domination through implied and overt aggression. Inspired by inaccurate observations of captive-wolf behavior. Also considered a technique of abuse.

Annotated Protocols of Damian, The: An officially condemned but covertly popular forgery which purports to be an account of the modern Technocratic Union's foundations.

Arts of Pain, the: Shaping the reality of a person through torture and abuse.

Ashraaah, the: Title given to Nephandi who have left the material world behind and established their own Realms under their command.

**Assumption:** To become one with the Absolute. A possible goal of personal *Descent*.

**Baphie:** Another name for Nephandi of the Goatkids sect. (See *Goatkids*.)

**Baphomet:** Popular demonic entity given existence through human beliefs, misunderstandings, and trolling. (See *Goatkids*.)

**barabbi/ barabbus:** A Nephandus who began Awakened life as a member of another group and then defected to the Fallen. Often still works without the original group, to pervert and corrupt it from within.

Basilisk: Demonic god-entity given life by human belief that it might theoretically exist. (See *egregore*, *Heralds of Basilisk*.)

**Bhât:** Legendary Mesopotamian city-state ruled by the *Eaters* of the Weak. Essentially, the Nephandic Eden.

**Black Arts, the:** Capitalized, refers to Awakened magicks dedicated to corruption, exploitation, and torment. (See *Malefica*.)

Black Diamond, the: Metaphor, possiblyfor personal transcendence or for Descent at the end of the Qlippothic journey, in which the seeker achieves a sublime state of dark multifaceted perfection.

**Black Mass, the:** Infamous perversion of the Catholic Mass, often (but not exclusively) regarded as a fixture of *Satanism*. (See *heresy*.)

**Black Sun, the:** The radiant heart of *Thagirion*, which illuminates forbidden understanding with rays of anti-light. Also, a symbol popularized by Nazi occultism and certain (often white-supremacist) strains of *Satanism*.

Blargarian Mythos, the: Growing corpus of grotesque pornography, reputedly inspired by Nephandic sources and expanding by way of modern self-publishing.

**broken vessels, the:** The shattered *shells* of previous existences, reputedly destroyed by God in order to make the current reality. (See *Qlippoth.*)

Brotherhood of the Shield, the: Secret international police organization dedicated to extreme and abusive enforcement of "law and order" as defined by the Brotherhood. Reputed to have deep ties to Nephandic sources.

**Caul:** A "Flower of Rebirth" wherein a person has their soul dropped into Daath or the Abyss in order to be infused with Qlippothic essence and reborn as a Nephandus.

**Caul-Born:** A Nephandus who Awakened through the Caul, rather than being a converted mage or a person born with a Nephandic Avatar.

cell: A Nephandic cabal, coven, or group.

**Church of Satan, the:** Modern materialist religion founded by *Anton LaVey*; frequently blamed for evils they did not commit. Despite misperceptions, *not* a Nephandic cult.

**Conceptual Entropy:** The Art of destroying ideas and concepts with Entropy magicks while convincing people that the concept was dismantled with sound logic and valid arguments.

Consummation of Leviathan, the: The end-goal of personal Descent, wherein a Nephandus passes beyond the final *Qlipha*, *Thaumiel*, and attains the ability to symbolically (or perhaps literally) devour *Leviathan* and become a god. Also, a Nephandic way of saying: "We fear no monsters and no gods because we *are* the monsters and we *are* the gods."

**Daath:** In Kabbalah and Qlippoth, the Abyss between the first seven Sephiroth and Qlippoth and the final three. Also, the Fall into Qlippothic energies which begins the Nephandic Path.

Dark Web, the: 1) Internet content, sites, and groups that require specialized software, configurations or authorizations before you can access them; 2) Social networks associated with the Dark Web, often (though not exclusively) associated with extreme, illicit, or illegal activities. Also known as the Dark Net, darknet, darkweb, etc.

**Decadenti:** Global subculture dedicated to extreme hedonism and indulgence. Deeply connected with (though not exclusive to) the Nephandi.

**demon:** Extraphysical entity, often with malicious intentions toward humanity.

**Depths, the:** Lightless stage of the *Nightside*, wherein a traveler goes beyond the *Underworld* and reaches a state without illumination or clear signs to navigate by. The step in between the Underworld and the *Abyss*.

**Descent:** Nephandic Ascension, characterized as personal Descent (attainment of self-godhood), global Descent (the annihilation of existence), or a fusion of both.

**Dominions:** Synonym of *Qlipha*, so named because each Qlipha is dominated by certain demonic entities.

**Dragon's Tongue, the:** The secret language supposedly taught to early Nephandi by demons, and now used for rituals, Litanies, and other communications between Fallen Ones. (See *Haah'rath Kharoh*, *Litanies*.)

dregvati, or dregs: Pawns, cultists and allies of the Fallen.

Eaters of the Weak, the: Ancient name for Nephandi, supposedly the meaning of the phrase Nif ur 'en Daah, from which the name Nephandi may be derived.

**egregore:** An entity created and nourished by the psychic energy invested into it by (typically human) consciousness. (See *Basilisk*, *hypersigil*.)

evil: Malice, generally intentional and typically involved in causing harm and suffering. Sometimes divided by philosophy into natural evil, alien evil, metaphysical evil, theological evil, cultural evil, circumstantial evil, and personal evil.

**Ex-Futurians:** Tech-based Nephandi who work toward the *elimination* of the future. Also known as Exies. (See *Exie*.)

**Fall, the:** Common term for the beginning of a Nephandic Descent, and / or for the state of Descending.

flying monkey: Associates of an abuser who swoop in to aid or defend that person and attack the abused parties.

**fomor, or fomori:** Spirit-corrupted person with paranormal abilities but spiritual degradation and pending self-destruction. Often associated with the *Malfean* sect.

gaslighting: Abuse tactic in which the abuser reshapes the target's reality by contradicting what that party believes or knows to be real.

**Goatkid:** Nephandic sect of counterculture devotees dedicated to *Baphomet*.

God's Hammer, or Hammer Security Response: Pseudo-Christian mercenary army covertly founded by, and serving, the Nephandi.

Goetia (the), Goetic: 1) Demonology practice represented within *The Lesser Key of Solomon*; 2) demons associated with that practice; 3) "the Howling," source of those demons (possibly within the Qlippoth). Linguistic origins disputed.

Golden Bull, the: Global organization dedicated to malignant plutocracy; a Nephandic cult. (See *Mammonites*.)

Gospel of St. Basilisk, The: Online pseudo-scripture referring to the coming ascendency of Basilisk, circulated in order to bring its prophecy about. (See Basilisk, egregore, Heralds of Basilisk.)

Haah'rath Kharoh: Proper name for the Dragon's Tongue.

**hell, Hell:** Referring to an Otherworldly Realm of torment and damnation; the proper name of a classically recognized hell realm.

Heralds of Basilisk: Nephandic sect dedicated to bringing about global extinction through the meme-god Basilisk, and to tearing humanity apart through virtual media with physical, psychological and metaphysical effects. (See Basilisk, HOB, hypersigil.)

heresy: An approach to a creed that is generally considered dangerous and disreputable by conventional authorities of that creed. Often utilized with or inspirational to Nephandic paradigms, practices, and pawns.

HOB: Abbreviation for one of the Heralds of Basilisk.

**human trafficking:** Modern name for chattel slavery, in which people are sold as commodities.

**hypersigil:** A work of media invested with belief or psychic energy in order to manifest a magickal intention. (See egregore.)

**Inanna:** Sumerian goddess associated with descent into the *Underworld*; also, a goddess whose name was mutated into a variety of demonic identities, one of them male.

**infernal science:** Disreputable or malign approaches to science and technology.

**Infernalist:** 1) Capitalized, a magus or sorcerer dedicated to demonic entities and forces; 2) a Nephandic sect associated with demonic entities.

**Investment, Investiture:** Capitalized, a paranormal power or set of powers given to an Infernalist in exchange for a pact; the process of giving or receiving such powers.

**Ironhands, the:** Nephandic sect dedicated to technology and *infernal science*.

**K'llashaa:** Nephandic sect dedicated to forces and entities of primordial chaos; Nephandi sane enough to realize how insane existence truly is. (See K'wahhll, *primalism*.)

**K'wahhll:** "Howlers of the Waste" who originated the K'llashaa sect; considered extinct.

Labyrinth: A Nephandic Sanctum or Chantry.

**Laham:** A human born with demonic heritage, powers, and weaknesses.

**LaVey, Anton:** Founder of the *Church of Satan* and modern *Satanism*; probably not a Nephandus.

**Left-Hand Path, the:** Disreputable or self-oriented approach to esoteric creeds, often defined as being "heretical" because of an emphasis toward increasing personal power, or seeking power from within rather than from external sources.

**Leviathan:** Demonic monster-serpent, seen as a symbolic (?) representation of seizing power and becoming a god. (See Consummation of Leviathan, Wyrm.)

**Lex Praedatorious:** "Law of Predation"; the core Nephandic ethic: "You are predator, or you are prey."

**Lilith:** The First Woman, goddess, or demon most closely associated with feminine power, lust, aggression, and defiance; also, the first Qlipha of the *Tree of Knowledge*.

Lilithism: Devotion to Lilith and her ways.

Litanies: Nephandic scriptures, records, archives, and rituals.

Los Sangrientos: "The Bloody Ones"; South American Nephandic cult dedicated to demonic aspects of Aztec and Maya gods.

**love-bombing:** Abuse tactic in which the abuser isolates the target with extravagant praise and gifts, installing a sense of obligation and dependence on the abuser.

Luciferianism: Satanic creed in which the Fallen Angel Lucifer is regarded as the maligned hero who opposed a tyrannical God; considered a form of heresy.

maleficia: Magic or magick with malign intentions, practices, and results.

**Malfean:** Nephandic sect dedicated to cosmic Entropy, epitomized by the Wyrm and its manifestations. (See *Urge-Wyrm*.)

Malleus Nefandorum, The: Classical grimoire, reputedly for hunting Nephandi but actually a trap laid by them; a source of much misinformation about the Fallen.

**Mammon:** Demonic lord of greed for material wealth. (See *Mammonite*.)

**Mammonite:** Nephandic sect dedicated to the predatory and intentionally malignant pursuit and employment of extreme wealth; originally the *Grand Fellowship of Mammon*. (See *Tsujigiri*.)

Moru Raven Press: Occult publishing company which circulates material of frequently Nephandic nature and origins; the New Age front for a Nephandic sect.

Nietzsche, Friedrich: Philosopher who literally wrote the book about being "beyond good & evil," and whose works inspired later existentialists, Nazis, and modern Satanists.

**Night Hunters, First Hunters, the:** Humans of the *Predatory* Age, who learned the secrets of predatory skills and magicks from animal-spirits and demonic entities; considered the source of *Lex Praedatorious*.

**Night of Pan, the:** State of transformation where a Qlippothic seeker drops through the Kabbalistic *Tree of Life* and into the forbidden Tree of Knowledge.

**Nightside, the:** Metaphorical journey from Light into Darkness, often reflected in physical locations and spiritual explorations; stages in Nightside journeys are: The *Shadow*, the *Wilderness*, the *Underworld*, the *Depths*, and the *Abyss*.

**Obliviate:** Another name for an *Exie*; from "one who pursues oblivion."

**Patron:** Capitalized, a demonic patron, mentor, and source of *Investiture*.

**Pipers, the:** Global slave-trade cult, tied deeply to the Nephandi. (See *human trafficking*.)

**Predatory Age, the:** Early stage of human development, where humans learned tactics for survival and became predators instead of prey.

**primalism, primitivism:** Philosophy or lifestyle that condemns technology and favors a pursuit of "naturistic" living and "fighting back against the modern world"; favored by several Nephandic paradigms and cults.

Qlipha: One of the Qlippothic Realms. (See also, shells, the.)

Qlippoth/ Qlipoth: 1) Forbidden remains of previous universes; 2) "the shadow-side of God"; 3) source of Nephandic energies and self-transmutation; 4) the Tree of Knowledge, through which one faces demonic forces and potentially achieves self-godhood. The 10 Qlippoth are known as: Lilith, Gamaliel, Samael, A'arab Zaraq, Thagirion, Golchab, Gha'ag Sheblah, Satariel, Ghagiel, and Thaumiel. (See *Qlipha*, *shells*, *the*, *Tree of Knowledge*, *the*)

Ramaas Kaa: Alien entities sometimes conjured and employed by powerful Nephandi.

**redemption, repentance:** 1) Striving to atone for misdeeds; 2) being forgiven; 3) something Nephandi are legendarily bad at.

**Satanic Temple, the:** Modern organization dedicated to social justice and political reform, which uses Satan as a symbolic refutation of American Evangelical political influence.

**Satanism, satanic:** 1) Symbolic or literal reverence for "the Adversary," Satan; 2) general name for creeds or behavior which go against the grain of mainstream Christianity; 3) materialistic philosophy opposed to self-denial in the name of religion.

**Sebel-el-Mafouh Whash, The:** Reputed inspiration for the *Malleus Nefandorum*, which recounts purges of Nephandic cults through extreme measures.

**Shadow, shadow, the (Jung's):** According to C.G. Jung, the repressed elements of a person or culture; also, the initial stage of the *Nightside*.

**shells, the:** The *broken vessels* of the Qlippothic worlds (Qlippoth literally means "shells").

**sociopathy chic:** The fashion or ethic of crushing empathy and enjoying cruel behavior for its own sake.

**sociopathy:** 1) A mental condition in which a person cannot recognize or understand the emotional consequences of his actions on other people; 2) a pathological lack of empathy, due to that condition. Also known as Anti-Social Personality Disorder (ASPD), psychopathy, or clinical sociopathy, with definitions being hotly disputed and subject to change.

Supplicium: Archaic name for a Nephandic Seeking.

**technephandi:** Nickname for Nephandi who pursue Enlightened technology or hypertech in place of, or in addition to, traditional magick. (See *infernal science*, *Ironhands*.)

**Theo-Obliviates:** *Exies* who encourage and pursue the idea of global extinction by way of gods, demons, and spiritual apocalypse.

Those Who Dwell Behind the Stars: One of many names for the Dark Masters, Lords of the Void, Deep Lords of Misrule, etc.; considered to be malevolent gods, alien beings, Nephandic Oracles, and so forth.

**Traditionalism, traditionalism:** Modern philosophy which asserts that absolute, universal truths are under siege by forces of decadence, diversity, and political correctness; sometimes used by Nephandi as a paradigm and recruiting tool.

Tree of Knowledge, the: Symbolic name for the Qlippoth; according to some accounts, the Qlippoth reflects or embodies the Tree of Knowledge whose divine secrets the Abrahamic God did not want humans to understand.

**Tree of Life, the:** The tree of immortality which, in Kabbalah, symbolically represents or embodies the Emanations through which Divinity manifests in the universe.

**Tsujigiri, the:** Japanese name for *Mammonites*; translated, the name refers to the practice of samurai "testing their swords" on passing commoners.

**undercutting:** Abuse strategy in which the abuser undermines the reality, connections and confidence of the person she's abusing.

**Underworld, the:** 1) The Realm of the Dead; 2) Hell or a hell realm; 3) the destination of *Inanna* during her *Descent*; 4) a stage of the *Nightside*.

**Universe B:** 1) Theoretical "new universe" beyond the final Qlipha, *Thaumiel*; 2) possibly the Qlippoth itself; 3) perhaps a

universe composed of Dark Matter 4) a theoretical new state of existence following a technological or occult singularity; 5) a new cosmos created by an emerging Nephandic god.

**Urge-Wyrm:** In Nephandic thought, godlike aspects of the Wyrm who embody and inspire forbidden urges; revered and sometimes worshipped by *Malfean* Nephandi and their cults.

Vamamarga, Vamacara: The Left-Hand approach to Tantra; often considered disreputable or heretical.

**Void, the:** 1) The Deep Umbra; 2) the *Absolute*; 3) the ultimate stage of the Nightside; 4) the state of consummate nothingness.

widderslainte: Name for a person born with an Avatar that underwent Descent in a previous incarnation and wishes to stay that way or do it again.

Wilderness, the: The "wandering forsaken in the wilderness" stage of the Nightside.

Wyrm, the: God-entity embodying primordial corruption, decay, and Entropy; sometimes associated, by Nephandi, with Leviathan.

# Nephandic Titles

In the current era, only Infernalist Nephandi assign much importance to these titles. Though considered traditional, the following honorifics (aside from Ashraaah) are rather archaic, and the newer generation doesn't pay much attention to them anymore. Capitalization is a matter of taste, combined with the desire to not get cooked by a pissed-off elder.

Ansinistratus: A specialist in temptation, corruption, subversion, betrayal, and renunciation of previous ethics and loyalties. Plural adsinistrati.

Ashraaah: A powerful Nephandus who has created her own Realm(s) and largely exiled herself from Earth. Plural Ashraaahs. (See Gilledian.)

**Aswad:** A "bodhisattva of the Abyss" who appears to be a normal person but is actually a Nephandus of deceptive and astonishing power. Sometimes also used to refer to Nephandic Archmages or (rarely) Oracles. Plural **aswadim**. According to rumor, only six or seven such entities exist, but they *are*, by nature, deceptive, so there may be fewer of them... or more.

**dregvat:** Old name for a Nephandic pawn, cultist, or ally. Plural **dregavi**. Often referred to as "the dregs," this title is never capitalized, as dregs are not worth that much respect.

Gilledian: Absurdly powerful and deformed Nephandi whose paranormal talents and scars have left them unfit for earthly reality. Named for the infamous French Infernalist Gilles de Rais. Plural gilledians or sometimes gillediai.

**Lila:** Old name for a Nephandic elder of the feminine gender. Named, of course, for Lilith. Plural **lili**, **lilai**.

**Prelate:** Nephandic elder of formidable power and influence but subtle tactics. Plural **prelati**.

**Shaytan:** Violent Nephandic stormtrooper, AKA cannon fodder. Plural **shaytans**.





If you go far back enough into any villain's story, you'll find they started as the hero.

— Jen Soska

The moon above is blood, dripping red upon the earth below. Its surface writhes with tortured souls, the essence of those born and shunned and damned before Earth had a name and before humanity crawled from the shadows of their overlords and claimed the sun as a beacon of their light. Behind the stars above, the Abyss waits, hungry, eager to consume. Yet such eagerness is measured in eternities, and an age will pass before their maws gape wide and swallow our sun.

Damp soil beneath my feet squirms with maggots and rot. Dense smells enrapture me – shit, sweat, sweetness, decay. The carnal perfumes daze my senses, carry me like atoms on the breeze. I am the rotting corpse, the fly, the stench. They mingle within me, becoming one.

The moon bleeds, and I bleed with it.

She comes to me as serpents, their jaws like lions, their teeth the needles which piece the skin. Her kiss is heroin. Her eyes, desire. Her serpent-self wraps around my limbs, sinking needles, ripping skin. They clench my muscles, grind my bones. In rapture, I am lost to pain. Descend. Arise. Consumed. Consume.

She spits my pieces in the dust.

I bleed into soil, like the moon.

The dark enfolds me. Stars disappear.

Light flees the coming of the purge.

All breath is silence. All sound stills.

In depthless blackness, I unfold – my wings arcing to catch the stars. I am nothing. We are All.

My self is my prison, and my sentence is forever.

# **Enough**

Aren't you tired of it?

The white noise of consumer culture? The treadmill of work-sleep-consume-repeat? The platitudes and lies tossed at your head as if they're supposed to mean a goddamned thing? Purity commandos sweeping in to tell you what you cannot say and who you can and cannot say it about? Folks telling you to be ashamed of who and what you are? Haven't you just gotten sick of it all yet?

Lam

The world as we know it is a trap. It is. We are bred like sheep to fleece and consume and wallow in our own shit while the farmer sits in his house and gets rich off our existence. You think you're better than the so-called "masses," right? Well, you're not. You're just another sucker trapped in the pen with the rest of us, ankle deep in manure and baaing our stupid heads off at each other while the farmer sharpens his

## Drinking Broken Glass

Our esteemed narrator may be telling the truth as they know it. That doesn't make them right about what they say. "Truth" is slippery, often conditional, and subject to change when you view it from a different perspective. If this Nephandic tour guide seems to be making a little too much sense, just remember — that's the way they work: Use just enough truth to get what they want, and then tilt it in the direction that makes them sound right even when what they're saying is abominable.

Don't get me wrong: They make some pretty good points here. It's just part of the picture, though — a broken glass, so to speak, half-full of blood and the other half filled with sewage. They're not wrong, exactly, but do you want to drink that shit? Or do you want a new glass, even if you have to clean it up yourself?

More to the point, would you want to take that broken glass and feed its contents to an innocent kid? Because that is what the Fallen do. Rather than drink from that glass themselves, they force the contents down someone else's throat, or trick another person into drinking it, and then consider themselves superior for doing so. Hey, at least they didn't drink from that glass, right? I guess that makes them smarter than you.

Except, of course, they're not. They're just too lazy to get another goddamned glass, and so in love with themselves that they feel clever about forcing poison down someone else's throat if that means they didn't drink it themselves. The Fallen lash out because lashing out makes them feel strong. It's fear and pain disguised as righteous fury because at least that feels better than surrender.

knife and decides which of us will get sheared and which of us will breed and which of us will get eaten today.

Don't you see the cage? Really, how can you *not*? They're not even trying to be subtle about it anymore. They know they can grin and say all the right words and you'll keep on punching that clock, keep on busting your ass, keep on pulling the lever for thieves and liars because at least your thieves and liars are better than those *other guys*' thieves and liars, right?

Don't you want better than that?

I know I do.

I used to be like you. I was like you, once. Raised to do the right thing, be a nice little kid, keep my room clean, go to school, go to work, pay my taxes, make money, buy stuff, maybe fuck once in a while if I get lucky, the whole deal. I got schooled the good old-fashioned way, too: yelling, hitting, the back of the hand, the belt across my ass, threats, shame, all the best ways to beat the Devil out of you. Sit up straight, don't curse, don't slouch, be a lady, be a gentleman, do what you're told, and if we think you're good enough, and smart enough,

and a hard-enough worker to pull yourself up out of this pit we dropped you into, then we'll stick you in this little box — maybe if you're *really* good, a bigger, *better* box! — and chain you to a paycheck while taking most of it back for ourselves. That's what normal looks like. That's the training we receive.

I used to be like you, until I broke the leash and buried my teeth in the master's face.

I did it. You can, too.

Look, you seem like a smart cookie, so I'll be straight with you. Honest. Full disclosure. Why *should* I lie to you, anyway? Lying's too much work. Fuck that. Truth is simpler and lot more effective. You can take it however you please. I don't care. We're all on this ride together, and you knowing where it's going isn't gonna change the tracks.

You don't *have* to be a pawn. You don't need to play their games. Sure, they'll scream and pitch a fit once you step off their path but that's their problem. It doesn't have to be yours.

Life sucks. That part's inevitable. But you can make it suck a lot less if you step up and refuse to play victim anymore. You have the potential to remake the world in your own image, at least to a small degree, and to establish your own place at the top of the heap instead of at the bottom.

That's what we do. People like me. You probably shouldn't be seen talking to me this way, but hey — here we are, and the door's right there if you want to use it. Just realize that if you stick around and listen, you'll see the world differently. Dangerously. Without illusions or restraint. Other folks won't like that. *Really* won't. They might censure you, curse you, maybe even kill you, burn your soul, and blow the ashes out Oblivion's ass just for sitting here with me. That's a risk you take if you want to hear the truth. Straight up, no bullshit bought or sold. I have what you want if you're willing to listen to what I have to say. If not, it's no skin off my nose. Save me the time and yourself the trouble.

Life is a war. Always has been, always will be. Expecting anything different is delusion. All that shit about peace and respect and equality is just a tactic to take what's yours and hand it off to someone else. You are a predator, or you are prey. It's that simple. Those of us who refuse to be prey must step off the Sheeple Express and make our own way in this world, and anyone who stands in the way of our freedom deserves to get mowed down.

That's the truth, and I'm sticking to it.

Not going anywhere, huh? Okay. This is on you, then.

Are you ready for alternatives?

If so, let's talk...

# The Atrocity Exhibition

Welcome to our world.

It is our world, you know. It always has been, but now, with the dreams of a new era dying amidst the storms of



war, catastrophe, and unrelenting global hatred, the fact is indisputable. We are the masters of this age, its avatars and puppeteers, the gleaming embodiment of our most sacred truth: Man is a monster, God is a dick, and the only thing you can truly depend upon is yourself.

Now, more than ever before, this is clear.

Our rival brethren disagree, of course. They hold the charming view that man can elevate his baser self. The children of technology await Utopia, shaped by brilliant minds and noble hearts, refusing to admit that their palaces of plastic, steel, and glass are — at root — dirt baked in fire until it assumes a semblance of accomplishment. The god-criers preach salvation through cosmic overlords whose wisdom makes order out of primal chaos. Philosophers fumble toward abstract ideals beyond the grasp of mortal men, while reformers bleed for compassion that will never come. Other mages devote their lives to what *could* be. We devote our lives to what *is*. And what *is*, as anyone with clear sight can see, is a realm of depthless horrors paved over with delusions of civility.

Let's take a stroll, shall we? We can start with your next-door neighbor's house, where the father's beating the fuck out of his wife and kids while the "news" tells him how liberal traitors are destroying America. If you've got the stomach for it, we can go pop by after the punches stop falling and

everyone's headed off to bed, when dad goes to "check in" on his little girl in ways he hasn't "checked in" with his wife for months. But hey — I'm not saying all the bad guys are rightwing conservatives or anything like that. Hell, the guys down the block, the ones running that cool RPG on the weekends and saying all the right things on social media, convinced a woman in their gaming group that renting out her kid to pedophiles was an excellent way to pay off the dope debt she owes them. I've got to hand it to those boys, that was one slick sales presentation! Worthy of one of our very own, and yet they're still convinced they're good guys in the eyes of their oh-so-progressive social-media friends.

Men *suck*, don't they? Total garbage people, all of them. Just ask that girl who secretly hounded a few of her classmates to suicide last year. She'll tell you. She told them. Oh, nobody's put the pieces together yet — she's good at what she does. That pathetic old dude who's been buying her whiskey in return for an hour or so of her flirtations thinks she's pretty amazing, too, even though he hasn't gotten so much as a hug for his troubles. They're just friends, that's what he keeps telling himself. Two of the boys who killed themselves thought so, too...and that one girl who imagined herself to be that charming young lady's best friend starved herself into the hospital last month but remains convinced she's too fat because her "best friend" keeps telling her she is.

The guy at this address dragged a girl behind his buddy's pickup truck, then dumped their human ragdoll off a bridge. The poor kid was still alive at the time, but the river finished her off eventually. There's the grandma who threatened to snip her grandson's penis off with garden shears if she caught him playing with it again, and the old war vet who still smiles when he recalls the young Vietnamese woman whose teeth he knocked out with an M-16 when she cursed him out in perfect French. We haven't even left the block and there's enough human sewage here to choke an angel. The "artist" whose wife does sex work exclusively to support their heroin habit, the day-laborer who drinks his pay away trying to forget the friend he left cooking in a storage container when the guy threatened to rat him out to the employer they'd been stealing from, the old lady who poisons cats when no one's looking, then buries them in her backyard so the neighbors don't find out...And you idealistic morons think you can redeem this species? Human beings are trash. It's our natural state, and all the enlightened homilies in the world won't change that.

That's not even a bad neighborhood, really – not one of those places where your girlfriend would sell you out for a baggie of meth, or where bangers with bruised knuckles and gun-oil fingertips grab girls off the streets and rent them by the hour, or where every other warehouse holds human traffic with busted teeth and broken spirits. Or one of the really high-end areas, either — the ones where asking, "How many people do I have to kill in order to afford a house here?" is not a joke, it's a fact. The well-lit homes where literal slaves get flown in from Syria or India or Ukraine with promises of a work visa or shelter from this month's latest war. The mansions where wealthy tyrants rape entire generations of relatives and servants and get away with it all because no one wants to upset the applecart everybody eats from. The office buildings where go-getters figuratively slit one another's throats for the corner office while figuring out which mercenary company will be most effective at wiping out those local troublemakers... and then go home to their beautiful homes and their lovely but disposable wives, while attending prayer breakfasts with their local representatives and bragging about how soon the government will operate under biblical law.

Let's go even further out, shall we? To those mountains of garbage where barefooted children scrounge for sellable scraps while industrial poisons eat them from the inside out. To the refugee camps under a blazing-hot sun, where a mouthful of water costs more than the average laborer makes in a week. To the "humanitarian aid" centers where hippie do-gooders force local girls and boys to fuck for food and water, or the "tender years" center where fleeing kids have been separated from their families by a bureaucratic machine and then sold off to slavers, pervs, and the local "disaster relief" agency for healthy profits under the table. You don't even need to go to one of the many war-ravaged clearinghouses of weapon sales and religious carnage and see the people with blown-off arms and drone-shattered faces. You can just sit at home and browse

the internet for "Russian brides" and "Asian girls looking for love"—or, in blunter terms, for on-demand-sex-slaves who won't dare say "no" unless they're looking for deportation back to something even worse. Check the dark web ads for rent-by-hour children, or spend all day clicking links for torture porn where all the screams are real. You don't need to go to hell, is what I'm saying here, because hell is already here, all around us, every day. We live in it, we play in it, we create it, and we enjoy it.

From the shittiest squat to the tallest gleaming glass towers, human beings feed on innocence, shit out money, and call themselves virtuous for deeds that would shame Satan himself. They even graft the face of their god across churches filled with child porn and temples built from the literal bones of the men who laid the foundations. They'll whip a woman to death for loving the wrong person, chase little girls back into a burning school, or jet around the world on a fleet of private planes paid for by food taken from the mouths of starving kids. Who needs a statue of Mammon, after all, when you can feed babies into the fuel tank of a Lear Jet while calling yourself an emissary of your god?

This is the face of your Sleeping Masses, kid. This is the reality behind Ascension's ideals: A cancerous species of self-deluded chromosomes, causing misery by drawing breath. An extermination-level event on two legs, bragging about how the gods it designed in its own flawed image love it best.

There's so much nonsense out there about my kind. It's like someone shat out a bunch of bad horror-movie clichés and thought they were saying something profound about us. Here's the truth — the real truth that, as that one guy said in that '80s movie, you can't handle.

We are the Fallen. All of us.

We make reality the shitshow that it is.

Who needs "elder gods" and "Dark Masters" from the Void when plain old human evil does the job?

It's been said that man's a virus. That's an insult to the virus and gives too much credit to the man. A virus doesn't know what it's doing; human beings do. Hypocrisy and violence are in our DNA. We conquer and torture and butcher and destroy and then pat ourselves on the backs for a job well done because that's what human beings do. There are, as some biblical jackass put it, none righteous — no, not one. The brighter the light, the deeper the shadow, and all humanity walks within that shadow, averting our eyes from the image on the wall.

Humans don't require boogeymen to destroy our world. We do it every day for fun and profit, close our eyes, and binge watch another show while whole fucking nations burn.

You can't save that which does not wish to be saved.

The only "ascension" humanity deserves is the end of our long, bad joke.

It's not just human beings who are awful, either. It's everything. I mean really: Cancer? Ebola? Brain-eating zombie-ant fungus? Even without our deep wells of despicable humanity, gods and

nature have conspired to lock us on a funhouse of horrors. Let's all be honest with ourselves: Creation fucking sucks. It's a rigged game and we all lose in the end. Between a traumatic birth and a painful death, we live in a world of sickness, violence, disease, deformity, war... not just human beings but every living thing. Life exists at the expense of other life, and the lives snuffed out to feed their stronger counterparts often die in excruciating fear. Life is terror and agony and death – that's the bottom line. If this is some god's divine plan, then that god is an asshole. If it's random chance, then life is meaningless. The only fact of life is that we are born from pain, live in pain, and die in pain...and if we're unfortunate enough to wind up in some cosmic hell, as most people do, then we're in pain after death as well...and then, if we're not so stuck on ourselves that we wind up anchored in that final afterlife, then we're reborn through reincarnation to live in pain again, and again, and again, and again...

And it's not like this pain is merely physical. Consciousness makes it even worse. I mean, it's bad enough, I guess, to be a blade of grass...grass which, by the way, has a degree of awareness, too, even if your lawn will never write The Complete Works of William Shakespeare. The grass doesn't contemplate its place in the universe the way we do, though, and really – once you start contemplating that sort of thing, it's terrors all the way down. Our sense of identity is a curse. Our ability to comprehend that curse is punishment. Is it because some talking snake convinced a naked chick to eat the fruit of a vengeful jealous god? Or because the sun goddess threw a hissy fit and hunkered down in the back of a cave until she felt like coming out again? Are we walking trauma batteries, reliving childhood molestation and a desire to rub shit on the walls? Or fractured bits of someone else's war, desperately seeking meaning in an existence we're too blind to comprehend? The more you ask these questions, the crazier it drives you.

Existence is a nightmare, is what I'm saying here.

Ending existence, then, is the most merciful thing we can do. That, or creating another existence in which the flaws of this world are — unlike in the already-corrupted Digital Web — removed. In order to save this world and everything within it. And that latter goal? That's a pipe dream — a goal to aspire to, perhaps, but not something you or I are ever likely to achieve in this or any other lifetime. It's bullshit, really. Jack off all you like to your precious Ascension crap but it's not gonna stop this world from spinning blood until the heat death of the universe. Till the lights go out, we suffer. We *all* suffer. *Everything* suffers. Fuck that. Let's just call the patient dead.

Someone has to make those hard calls, you know. You won't, so we will. In a world as big and sick and painful as this one is, it takes someone "fallen" to make those calls for you. That's what we do. We're not babbling devil-kiddies — we're the surgeons who determine when to pull the plug on the suffering terminal patient. What our sanctimonious rivals call "Descent" is, to us, a mercy killing. Personally, I think it's a lot crueler to leave something living in agony than it is to end its suffering and bring on the final sleep.

## You Must Make a Friend of Horror

We are the unafraid. Eaters of the Weak, Those Who Live Outside of Fear. We do, and we dare. Fear is our friend, our weapon, our transcendence and gateway to a better world. To be who we are and do what we do, you must abandon fear. Leave it at the door and lock that door behind you. From the moment someone chooses to live as we do, that person enters a new realm, faces it, and has her fear stripped from her like skin at an Assyrian court proceeding.

We refuse to be afraid of life's terrors. Instead, we make them dance with us.

Folks call us "the Fallen," like that's some sort of moral assessment that says everything there is to know about us. Sure, right, whatever. You just keep thinking that, Sherlock. Keep on typing away on computers built by slave labor in a far-off land. Whistle to yourself as you stride past that homeless guy on the corner, pretending not to see how bad he's hurting. Wrap yourself in virtue as you hammer away on "garbage people" online while conveniently convincing yourself that those gigs of porn on your hard drive were made by consenting sex workers, not trafficked slaves. Strap on those cool shoes made by little kids in some Taiwanese sweatshop for a buck or two a week, paid to the overseer who bought those kids from their parents or snatched 'em off the street on the way to school. Pretend it's not happening, O My Righteous One. Pretend you're not a part of it. Post selfies, gobble drugs, and convince yourself that I'm the villain here. Go for it. I don't care. Your self-deception won't change the facts.

We are the Fallen, sweetheart. All of us. Every human, every living thing. We're fallen monsters in a broken world. But hey — just keep thinking happy thoughts about yourself. At least I'm being honest about who and what we are.

People like me, we're warriors of the Real. We pull back the curtain in your heart and let you see what's really there. We're honest predators, living by Creation's laws. We might cloak our identities out of self-preservation but, unlike you, at least we're honest with ourselves. This is our age, our world, our reality, and you know it. You babble about hope's promise. We revel in hope's futility.

We're right next door to you. In your mirror, your home, your heart. We are the things you won't admit, not even to yourself. We're the mother pimping children for a fix. The businessman who sells baby food tainted with bacteria and broken glass. We're the cops busting heads, and the tycoons they protect. We're anarchists and status-quo enforcers. We turn humanity against itself for fun and profit and power. We sell weapons and run prisons. We manage every government on earth. We're the teenage grave-robber and the uncle with roving hands. We're the advertisers who convince you to hate yourself, and the pundits who tell you to hate others. We are Division. We're Leviathan. We're every sin in the lexicon of

man. We are legion, and we have already won. Our greatest weapon, you see, is that we understand the human heart. Our rivals seek to elevate it. We simply let it play.

That's what we're all about: not "evil," but *reality*. We recognize it for what it is, we strip away the illusions, and we step beyond the sheep pen where the rest of humanity — including you — choose to remain. We're realists, sweetheart, not idealists. You can keep your "thoughts and prayers" if they make you feel better. I left those delusions behind a long time ago, and my life and our world are better off for that.

Don't be afraid. Jump. Play. Hunt. Live. Run through the ruins. Dance in the flames. Really, why would you want anything less from life? It's not like being a good little lamb will save you from the knife. Ah, but if you grab that knife, rip it out of the farmer's hands and slit the fucker's throat with it, then you can escape that pen and run.

People say we were exiled. I tell you, we escaped.

If you're willing, you can, too.

#### Look for God Within

The first step of this escape involves realizing that you are your own god. Not a servant of some cosmic carcinoma — and trust me, I'll get back to *that* subject in a moment here — but the proverbial master of your fate and keeper of your soul. You were raised to be a sheep, but you were born to be a legend. Whichever role you choose in life is up to you.

Now, you and me, we're already ahead of the game in terms of the overall human flock. The odds are already in our favor. I know you know the basics here: Powers of a god, shaper of reality, blah blah blah – all that pretentious metaphysical horseshit they hand out to us supposedly woke... Oh, oops, I meant Awakened people. I don't need to cover that ground again - you know it as well as I do. We're all grownups here, so I'll give you the respect of treating you like one. Just by being who you are, you've already climbed out of the hardcore monkey mass and joined a more elite company. And yes, you can embrace that word: elite. You are better than most people. You are superior. There's no shame in that. Fuck all that equality noise - some animals really are more equal than others, and we're those beasts. Please don't insult either one of us by pretending to be "one of the common people." You're not. I'm not, either. Change, as they say, is our birthright. We make shit happen because of who we are and what we can do. Don't ever be ashamed to be as powerful as you can be.

While we're at it, let's also dispense with the hypocrisy of our warring groups, the oh-so-very-concerned-with-the-fate-of-mortals idiots who'll blow up whole city blocks full of "sleepers" if it means taking one another down or scoring a little bit of turf. Those cranky medieval wizards trying to bring back a "mythic age"? The black-suited spookshow gouging out humanity's eyes for its own collective good? The witchy-poos and magic stoners who talk a good game while tripping balls and watering trees

# Of Mastery and Servitude

According to the *Malleus Nefandorum* ("Hammer of Nephandi"), a hunter's manual that established the popular conception of Nephandi, the Fallen Ones exist in a state of eternal supplication to Dark Masters from the Abyss.

And that's bullshit.

As detailed further in Chapter Five, the Malleus is a fraud, created and circulated by Nephandi in order to send their enemies barking in every direction but the right one. That image of Fallen Ones wailing at blood-stained altars in service to demonic overlords fit nicely into the medieval mindset during which the Malleus was conceived, and it suited the prejudices of authorities who read the work (or at least heard what it supposedly told them about Nephandic practices) and decided that such wretched souls must live their lives in malign bondage before surrendering to eternal damnation at the feet of their Dark Masters. But although Infernalist Nephandi do treat with devilish hosts, and Malfeans do honor the entropic principles embodied as the cosmic Wyrm, they don't actually worship and obey those entities.

They strive to become them.

Think of it like apprenticeship: While there's a certain element of obedience, dependence and hierarchy involved, the apprentice does not worship the master – he learns from her, takes whatever he can get from her, learns his trade, hones, his skills, establishes himself in a position to succeed, and then endeavors to surpass his master in every possible way.

Yes, there are people who bow and scrape at devilish thrones. And yes, dealing with godlike entities usually does involve a lot of deference when standing in their shadows.

Subservience, though, was never the Nephandic plan.

Since the days when primal hunters studied greater predators, crafted rituals around them, gave them offerings, and learned their secrets, the Fallen Ones have sought not to *submit* to those predators but to *become like them*, surpass them, and eventually — as humans did with cats and wolves — domesticate those predators for their own use.

with blood? Hey, let's go ask that "good death" chick over there who deserves to die for the greater good. Crank up the ol' generator with Dr. Would-Be Frankenstein and get him talking about how his newest theory will change the world. Tap on Terminator Jr.'s shoulder and ask him how that chaingun up his sleeve will make the monsters go away. Castles, labs, groves, festivals — it's all a giant scam, a con game run by the Masters of Reality in order to advance philosophical

agendas that inevitably leave them sitting in the Iron Throne while the rest of us beg for a plate of scraps.

Those people call me a monster, but at least I'm honest about who I am and what I'm doing here.

If you want to sit at their feet like a good little disciple, go ahead. I won't stop you. Why should I? More goodies for me, if you know what I'm saying here. If you want to play the altruist, do so. And when you find yourself staring at the ceiling in the middle of the night, maybe reeling through your life's choices at the moment before everything goes black for good, you can comfort yourself with the fact that you did what you were told, didn't rock the boat too much, had the fire in your hand and set it aside because you didn't really want power, you're a good person, all that shit. Wrap yourself up in your fucking integrity. Don't wonder too much about what you *could* have had, *might* have done, *should* have been if only you'd been braver when you had the chance.

Settle for that life if you want.

I'm not.

I haven't settled for a goddamned thing. And if that fire burns me then at least I know I had the fortitude to grasp that fire and hold it until I burned.

### Blasphemous Rumors

There's a silly rumor going around about people like me: We worship blasphemous nether-gods and howl at the sky like extras in a low-budget horror flick. We wear death-metal t-shirts and spray paint "Satin Rulz" on the overpass. We're all lying puppet masters who control pretty much everything from deep within our secret mazes underneath pizza parlors and shit. We've got tentacles and fangs and devil's marks. Babies cry when we approach, grass withers, all that shit. You know the drill and so do I. Fuck, I hear it all the time.

It makes me laugh, because all that nonsense came from us.

We're *trolling* you stupid fuckers. Been doing it for centuries. Plant a grimoire here, start a legend there, dress some

angsty kids up in black trench coats and then go point 'em at their classmates and wait for the word to spread. We were making memes long before Turing ripped a big hole in reality and let the internet crawl through, and we don't need to sign our work with some stupid cartoon frog. It's fun, it's easy, and people are easy to fool because so many people *are* fools.

Why do we do it? Misdirection. If folks are trying to kill you, point them at somebody else. Also, recruiting. If people want to do fucked-up shit, they'll provide excellent distractions while you go tend your own garden in peace and quiet. Hey, if some disgruntled jackass wants to paint a target on his chest, who am *I* do talk him out of it? If he takes some heat off of me, that's to my profit and his loss.

Now, it's true that we make shady deals under the table. *Everybody* does that, though, and the most self-righteous parties are usually the ones making the dirtiest secret deals. It's just business. You get in bed with people who can do you favors, everybody scratches the necessary itches, and all parties at least like to *think* they got the better end of the deal when the sun comes up and the invested parties do their respective walks of shame. If that leaves holy dumbshits thinking that we worship mad tentacle gods, well goodie for them. The more they think they know, the better off we are.

That's not to say we don't party occasionally. I am always up for a good time, and the best entertainments come from breaking rules with style. As the man said, being bad feels pretty good. Transgression is sexy, and virtue's overrated. I never heard of someone on his deathbed saying he wished he'd spent more time at the office or on his knees. We are meant to be lions, so there is not one damn thing wrong with roaring when we want to roar.

But that devil-worship bullshit? It's a smokescreen, kiddo. We make friends, deals, enemies and slaves, but never give ourselves away to anyone. That "Yes, Master" shit is not our style. Our Path embraces self-godhood and the refinement of the soul into a Black Diamond of utmost purity.

# Food of the Gods

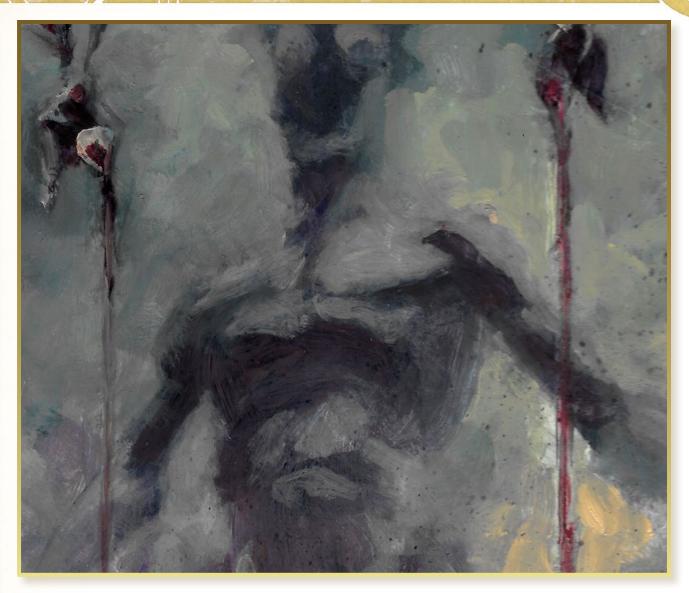


Let's be clear: Religion is a lie. A scam. A feeding trough. The faithful become food for the godheads they revere. They're not "saved," they're not forgiven, and the only heaven they attain involves digestion into the cosmic bellies of astral fucksticks clever enough to fool their faithful into expecting something more. The history of religion is one long smear of blood, and while that sort of thing can be fun in moderation, the worst

atrocities imaginable came not from devils but from folks who acting out the wishes of their gods.

Oh, but doesn't religion elevate us? Make us part of something better? Provide a sense of purpose in an existential world? Fucking *please*. The very *last* thing a religion is, when you get right down to it, is comforting. You're a sinner. You're damned. You suck. Some pair of awkward progenitors listened to a talking snake and now everything *is* pain and horror and *that's* supposed to be perfect justice in the sight of God? Sorry, but the story doesn't wash for me, and if that sort of thing strikes you as love or justice then I feel sorry about your childhood.

Religions teach us to kill the unbelievers while cutting ourselves off from everything it means to be human. If we



throw our lives away kneeling in some megachurch, maybe the god behind this whole fiasco will have a little mercy on us and give us a "Get Out of Hell Free" card so we can hang out and indulge his selfish ass rather than get tortured for all eternity on his say so. Really, it's insane the things we come up with to justify existence. We create gods that take the worst elements of man and dress them up in cosmic drag, and then we fucking kneel to it all. Hey, folks – carve off your baby's foreskin so that God will let him into heaven. What kind of god even thinks of something like that? A god who made humanity to be his slaves while he built the world out of hacked-up dragon bits? Gods who rape mortals as bulls or showers of gold just because they can? Divinities who create babies born with cancer or brains outside their skulls? A god who is – to quote his own "holy book" – the source of all things good and evil, who tells his followers that the lepers suffering from sicknesses he made for them must be driven off into the desert to die because he himself made them "unclean?" Look, I don't know what you believe in personally,

and to be honest I really don't care. From where I'm standing, though, it's all sadistic bullshit. Religion is a lie that humans tell ourselves so we can foist excuses for our own shittiness off on some cosmic fall guys instead.

Oh, there *are* gods. I can attest to that. Or at least things you might call a god if you were desperate enough to believe that a spirit cobbled up from human thought is somehow worthy of worship just because it's stronger than you'll ever be. That stuff exists. I've seen it. Whether or not you'd call those beings "loving" or "just," however, depends on just how badly you want to get on their good side and how much you'll justify in order to stay there if you manage it. You can worship those things if you like — I won't try and stop you. Why should I? You're cattle to your gods. You're *meat*. They feed on you. Religion is the butcher block. Faith is the axe. Belief is meat and bone and blood.

And you call us the evil ones? Seriously? Wear an instrument of torture around your neck if that makes you feel more

# Doğs *Don't* Actually Eat Doğs

"It's a dog-eat-dog world" isn't actually true. The expression comes from a society where people breed dogs and pit them against each other in dog-fighting rings. Like the "rat race" metaphor, the whole "dog-eat-dog" thing reflects artificially created circumstances where people abuse animals for profit and entertainment. Left to their own devices in their natural environments, rats do not run mazes and dogs don't eat other dogs unless something's seriously wrong with them. Those sayings reflect a world altered by men, not one created by nature.

Outside of human interference nature tends to be implacable and ruthless rather than deliberately cruel. The natural balance tends toward equilibrium, not waste for its own sake; pain is inevitable but not intentional. A hurricane or broken bone or cancer doesn't cause suffering for its own sake — the suffering is a result of circumstances, not a goal to build circumstances around. Folks with predatory mindsets tend to equate ruthless nature with human greed, but objectively speaking that's just not true. A dog getting cancer? That's the way the world is. Dogs trained to murder other dogs for sport? That's the way people choose to make the world. And no matter what the Fallen and their allies claim, we can choose to make it otherwise. If people do not build the maze, the rats have better things to do than race.

holy, folks. Celebrate your god by eating his flesh and drinking his blood in order to escape the hell he made for you, and then tell *me* how *I'm* the one who's sick in the head. Hey, if

For more on this subject, see the entry for "Natural

Evil" in Chapter Two, pp. XX.

that's your game, go play it. Maybe you can even go old-school and burn me alive after torturing me for weeks. That'd sure teach *me* what peace and love and justice are all about!

Now, gods are real, at least in the astral sense. People believe in them, and that faith fuels astral energy, gives it form, and lends it power and identity. Thing is, the gods are parasites – not creators or savior but jackals made of spirit stuff. Once upon a time, some gods might have originated with a mortal consciousness or an elder race or cosmic principle; people saw it, worshipped it, and gave it form and hunger. Most of 'em, though, are pure delusions – methods of control through which people garner money, power, influence, and sex. One or two guys (and it is, you'll notice, near inevitably guys) come up with an idea, drape festivals all over it, whip up some rituals, and convince a bunch of idiots that their new creation is The One True God. It's a fun game, from what I hear, but a total scam. The concept that gods made humans in their image is absurd. Men make gods...sometimes become gods...not the other way around.

Atrocity is Divinity's feast. Gods exalt themselves through human suffering. Lives — human and otherwise — become fruit and bread and meat for gods to feed upon. Myth and religion say as much. Why else would Jehovah command his people to saw the people of Ammon into pieces, to burn them alive in kilns and to hack them apart with axes? Why else would Leviticus proclaim that God loves the smell of burning flesh? Why else would Deuteronomy decree that "God's people" have full license to enslave their enemies and take all their belongings, under the threat of extinction? Just as predatory animals devour lesser animals, predatory gods devour lesser beings to nurture their divinity.

Are you prey, then, or predator? I know which side of that table I'm sitting on. Do you?

Lest you think I'm dumping everything on religions and their gods, let me remind you that with or without religion, people are sadistic, evil turds. Stalin didn't need Jesus to tell him how to starve the multitudes to death. Pol Pot was trying to cure religion with his killing fields — and look how well that turned out for everyone involved. Ranavalona the Cruel protected her people from the ravages of European colonial Christianity...by tossing folks off cliffs, burning them alive or chopping them to pieces. Is boiling a Jesuit alive morally superior to roasting Aztecs on a spit? I'm asking on behalf of a few million friends. My point here is that while the gods may be crazy, the worms in their brains come from us.

#### Lex Praedatorius

Evil is a force of nature, a biological reality. It's part of the ecology and needs to be seen as such. The lion eats the antelope and then dies of cancer and gets eaten by bugs and birds because that's the way the world works. The antelope would call that evil. The lion probably would, too. Our ability to make words out of thoughts doesn't make us immune to the circle of life — it just means we get to drive ourselves crazy thinking about it too much, and cry about it when we could be eating that antelope instead.

Predation, not love, is the center of the universe. Dog-eatdog, as the saying goes, is the way the world works whether you want to admit it or not. We call this Lex Praedatorius: the law of predation. Every living thing tortures and kills in order to wring a little bit more life out of this world so it can live to suffer and inflict suffering, for yet another day, because that's all we have to work with here. We hate being born, we fear dying, and we're scared shitless of what lies beyond death because we sense that it's even worse than this... and we're right about that, too. Ever been to a hell realm? I have. Or an afterlife? That too. If you heft a brick in the Shadowlands, you can even listen to it weep. The paintings of Hieronymus Bosch are, let me tell you, a few steps shy of what really goes on in realms like those. And that's all the fault of consciousness. What consciousness envisions, life creates. Sentience breeds damnation, my friend, and if you doubt that fact you can go have a look at it the results yourself.

Enlightenment? Transcendence? What a joke! The more you understand, the more horrified you become. Archmaster magi go insane because they've begun to comprehend just how very fucked we are, and that comprehension drives them even crazier than they already were to begin with. Marauders glimpse the edges of the picture and that insight drops them off the cliffs of sanity. Anyone who thinks "awakening" is anything other than the product of tortured spirits in a fractured mind is fooling himself. Life is a prison, death's even worse, and only complete annihilation — of all things, for all time — can possibly bring relief.

And that's all the fault of Light. God, the gods, the natural order, whatever you want to call it, sentenced us to this. They trapped us all in a sadistic funhouse, and there's no way out of it. We're dishes on a cosmic sushi wheel, is what I'm saying here. Sooner or later, someone else reaches over, picks you off the conveyor belt, plops you down, and feasts on you. Now, me — I'd rather be the feaster than the feast. I'm stuck on this wheel with the rest of you but at least I'm smart enough to admit it and hungry enough to get you before you get me.

That's the law of predation, kid: Eat or be eaten. Hell, we'll *all* be eaten eventually but some of us get a lot more off the buffet than others. You're fucked, I'm fucked, we're all fucked, so we might as well have fun while we can. You don't get to abstain from the feast of the gods, baby. We're all on the menu, and not one iota of your precious virtues can save you.

More to the point, we human beings are killers in our own right. We are predators. We were born to be. We were made to be. We don't have herbivore eyes on the sides of our heads. We've got big brains and sharp senses, and teeth and jaws that can tear flesh off bone or crush up tiny bits of gristle between our molars. Our claws might not be big or sharp or obvious, but we stand tall, run fast, and adapt to circumstances like no other animal on this earth. We learned all our best tricks from wolves and bears and big cats, and then afterward we put them on a chain and make them work for us. We build bigger claws than any animal could possess. Our sexual characteristics are larger and more prominent than those of other primates, too, and we're in heat all year 'round. Basically, we were built to run and fight and fuck and think our way around every challenge in our path. We are apex predators, and although some beasts might be bigger or stronger than we are, we have killed the shit out of everything that presents a threat to us.

You're a born monster. Embrace it. Glory in it. Being monstrous is what we do best.

Human history is one big smear of blood. Peace is a joke — an unnatural state of being that, even when it seems to exist, is built on endless layers of quiet domination. Like I said earlier, all these goodies you enjoy come at a steep cost to someone else. What looks like peace to you is war to the folks on the receiving end of your nation's guns. Tell that

factory kid or that chocolate-plantation slave how peaceful you are. He'll laugh in your face...and if he thinks he can get away with killing you, he'll do that, too. Folks on the bottom hate people at the top, and people at the top piss on everyone beneath them. Peace is a lie. Coexistence is a sham. Equality is salesmanship for an agenda of pure domination. This is how it is. This is how things work. Just because you don't see it happening on your street doesn't mean it's not the way the world works for real.

So, hate me if you want. Call me evil if that makes you feel better about yourself. Those sentiments won't change a thing. You're looking at the way things *should* be. I'm looking at the way things *are*.

Which one of us, do you think, will be proved right in the end?

#### Becoming Leviathan

There used to be a blacklight poster back in the good old days, when kids could catch a blast of pot smoke and a flash of titties at their local record shop: It showed a big giant with a spiked club and a passage from that stale-ass Bible verse about fearing no evil in the valley of the shadow of death because — as the poster put it — "I'm the meanest son-of-a-bitch in the valley."

It was a joke, yeah. But it was also true.

There is a way out of this parasitic madhouse. A tiny crack in the walls of this fucked-up cosmic cell so you can give the Good Shepherd a nice swift kick in the balls before leaving the flock behind. It's not pretty, it's not easy, and you have to be a right bastard on a cosmic level to achieve it... but there is a way out. It ain't no sanity clause; it's pretty much the opposite. But there's a backdoor you can use to hack your way out of this system if you've got the ruthlessness to use it and the courage to see the journey through.

You devour Leviathan.

You become Leviathan.

You become the giant.

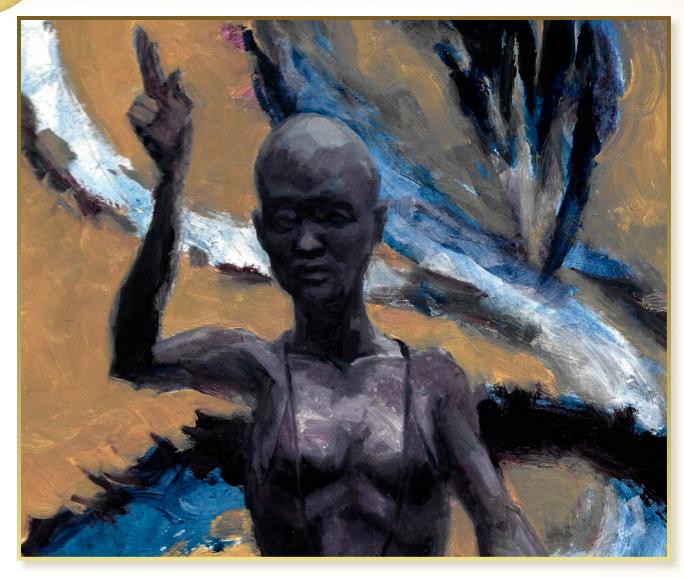
You become a god.

It sounds crazy, but it's true. Gods are composed of psychic energy. By worshipping them, we feed them. If you manage to turn that around, if you consume their psychic energy instead, then *you* get the benefits and they get the shaft.

Have you read the Book of Job, that Bible love story where God basically pulls a BDSM scene on his favorite worshipper, lets Satan fuck his life up one end and down the other in order to win a bet, and then, when Job finally says, "Hey, Lord – what the fuck?" takes the poor guy on a tour of Monster Island and shows off how big and bad God is by saying, "I beat up Leviathan. Could you beat up Leviathan?"

My answer would be "yes."

Why yes, yes, I can.



In Job, the Lord tells his servant that he'll kill Leviathan someday and then serve Leviathan up at a banquet for his favored slaves.

Fuck that. I'll make my own damn banquet, thank you very much. And I'm not sharing my kill, either. I'm saving it all for myself. That's how you become a god: You kill one, and eat it, and by eating it you become what that god once was.

Now, this is all metaphorical, of course. We call it the Consummation of Leviathan, and it's a symbolic way of saying, "We fear no monsters and no gods because we are the monsters and we are the gods." It's not about laying your hands on a monster-god and then serving him up with steak sauce. It's about realizing that nothing is impossible when you kill and eat your fears.

There is a metaphysical element to it all, of course. That's one of our little secrets, though, and you don't get to learn it unless you take the first steps and open yourself to possibilities. We're not handing our goodies out to anyone — you have to

earn the right to sit at that table, and it's a long, long way between the door of the banquet hall and the table where you get to kill and eat a god. There are challenges and trials and terrors to face and beat and conquer. Most people can't face them to begin with, a lot fewer can beat them, and almost no one makes it to the final stage because it's no small thing to consume godly power. If you've woken up enough to shake off the Sleep, you're at least ready to walk up...or rather, *down...* the stairs to where that banquet hall awaits you. That's a start, but I'll be damned — and I mean that literally — if I'm gonna pass out maps for that feast to any dipshit with a sparkle in his eye. This sort of thing, you have to earn the hard way.

Our way, or no way.

That's what we're really all about here. Not about kissing the goat because the goat says, "Kiss me," but about learning everything we can learn about that goat so we can serve the fucker up on a table for ourselves. If that involves kissing a goat... well, hell. Fine, I'll kiss a goat. Eventually, though, that goat winds up in my belly, because I'm the biggest predator of all.

# On the Nature of Demons

What in the actual hell are demons, anyway? The word means different things to different people, and it hasn't always meant the same thing even then. For simplicity's sake, let's use demon to refer to Otherworldly entities with innately malign intentions — not necessarily Fallen Angels in the Christian sense of that word, but ephemeral beings that rarely have humanity's best interests at heart.

The word's original Greek root daimon simply means "spirit," holds no negative connotations and, in Plato's work, connotated a helpful source of inspiration. The potentially related Sanskrit deva ("heavenly, divine, exalted shining ones") refers specifically to good entities, not malevolent monsters. As the Christian religion spread across that region, however — often drafting its scriptures in Greek — the word assumed the sinister tone it holds today. Given the suspicion with which monotheistic religions hold any form of influence other than those attributed to their god(s), it's not surprising that the Western spiritual tradition eventually assumed that any guiding spirit was in-nately bad. By modern times, "demon" referred to evil entities almost exclusively, and that impression has influenced the popular view of demons even when the linguistic terminology (akuma, asura, dalkhu, aasab) differs.

When the Fallen refer to demons (in whatever language suits the speaker best), they're talking about superior entities who have been denounced and hated by humanity, and who thus aren't terribly thrilled by our existence. Since the Nephandic moral compass is, shall we say, a bit skewed from conventional definitions of "morality," that hatred makes demons good company if, like the Fallen, you feel humans suck.

Thus, Nephandi don't consider it a bad thing to deal with demons. On the contrary, they often feel the demons have the right idea about us. Whether or not that's true depends on whose end of a demon's wrath you happen to be on at the time.

Oh, it's a lot easier to say it than it is to do it. Hell, if this club of ours was easy to get into, they'd let just *anybody* in. You have to throw your fears away and trample virtues underfoot and piss on everything you thought was sacred just to get a membership card for the door. That doorway's there, though. It's within reach for anyone brave enough and strong enough to take it.

Getting to that place is half the battle. More than half, really, if you fancy yourself a sentimentalist. We call ourselves the Eaters of the Weak for a reason, and you have to earn that name if you want directions to that doorway out of here. You've got to do things that would make a Monsanto lawyer

cringe, not because you're evil or because demons told you to but because that's the price of not being afraid. You need the heart of a killer, the guts of a butcher, the cold conviction of someone who's renounced everything he or she held sacred because you finally realized what a fucking lie it all is. You've got to not just be that giant but beat that giant at his own game. He's the son of a bitch but you're the Valley of Death. You'll fear no evil because you'll have left evil behind.

#### The Caul of Rebirth

What happens once you're through that door is really up to you. It's just the first step out of the pen, and that journey can take lifetimes. The further you go beyond the first door — through what we refer to as the *Caul*, where your soul becomes reborn — the sharper your fangs grow and the longer your claws become.

What's a Caul? It's a portal between this world and the Abyss. The womb of the Black Diamond. The Flower of Rebirth. Folks refer to it as the Passage, the Gulf, Lilith's Belly, the Black Fountain, and plenty of other names as well. It's got a physical form, but that shape is just a mask for what a Caul truly is. Really, it's a gateway to somewhere Else. Where? Don't get ahead of yourself, my friend. That's not part of today's lesson. It's a secret you need to earn. No one will hand you the keys to a Jaguar if you still need training wheels on your bike. For now, just know that a Caul is a doorway. A oneway gate to the Nightside. Once you step through it, you're changed forever.

And the Nightside? You'll figure it out. If you're meant to, anyway. See, lots of folks never make it past that doorway. The Caul chews 'em up and spit's 'em out if they're not truly committed to the deal. It hurts. A lot. I mean, it hurts either way, but if you're trying to bluff your way through a Caul, or maybe pretending to be one of us just so you can learn our secrets and all that crap, the Caul does our work for us. Folks who enter a Caul without being soul-deep loyal to the predatory Path get eaten from the inside out — physically, mentally, spiritually destroyed. So, believe me when I say this is the sort of thing you do only if you really, truly mean it. Once a person enters a Caul, either they come out of it as one of us, or they don't come out of it alive.

#### About Those Cauls...

What our humble narrator isn't saying here is that each Caul is a gateway to the Abyss, a black hole of Creation that's referred to in Kabbalah as *Daath*, a sort of cosmic gulf in the fabric of what *is* and what is *not*. From there, the initiate enters the fringes of the *Qlippoth*, an inverse reflection of the Tree of Life which symbolizes forbidden knowledge and unhallowed forces. For more details, see Chapter Four, pp. XX.

#### The Mercy of the Wolf

So, what about everybody *else*? If it's such an exclusive banquet, that what about all those people who don't know about it, don't want it, and wouldn't know how to do things our way even if they did?

It's very simple: We're going to put them out of their misery. Not because we want to, but because that's what we exist to do.

As I said, I'm being honest here, so that's the bottom line. Nothing can end the world's pain except ultimate Oblivion, so Oblivion is our gift to the world.

Don't act so fucking shocked. When you get right down to it, that's what every mage wants to do: remake the world in their own image. Get all the poor little Sleepers to open their eyes to the One True Way, at which point unicorns shit rainbows and humanity gets a pony everyone can ride.

Right? Seriously, that is what all this "Ascension" bullshit sounds like to me. Everyone winds up corralled into the same pen, looking up with big brown eyes at Farmer Mage with his big shiny knife, and saying, "Yes, Master, eat me up and make me whole."

You're all bigger predators than we are, and we're more honest about that than you.

Do you actually think Joe Button-Down wants to find enlightenment by toking his way through a pound of weed and shaking the Kundalini loose? Do you ever, and I mean ever, see the heads of state and industry suddenly dropping to their knees and thanking The One and then opening their bank accounts and giving all their worldly goods to the poor? Do you somehow imagine that if enough cyborgs and enough Black Suits fucked over enough minds and shot

enough would-be witches down in the streets, that all the world's evils would suddenly go away?

Is that what you actually believe?

Or is it just a comfortable fiction you tell yourself, so you can feel better about feeding off their beliefs and killing them for fun when they get in your way?

"Sleepers." "Masses." *Please!* Just say "Sheep," already and be honest with yourselves. You want the power and the glory and their adoration so long as they look the other way when you cast a spell. You mess with their heads and blow up their homes and pray the consequences of your actions won't come back and bite you in the ass.

At least *I* want to stop their suffering. You want them to suffer for your benefit.

And they do. And they will. Until the gods are dead, and the earth goes black and the Void comes in and returns us all to the Absolute from which we came, every living thing will suffer, and every dead thing will become someone else's meal.

You know what the real "good death" is? It's the end of suffering and the termination of this lie. That's what we're working toward, really. We "Fallen." We just want to put existence out of its misery.

Now, I ask you this: Faced with the inevitability of endless suffering, or the chance to go back to the eternal silent Void, which option is *actually* the evil one?

Your "Ascension" is the lie the farmer tells. Our mercy is the mercy of the wolf.

Not to belabor the point, but if you want to live in someone else's chains, that's your decision and your problem.

I won't, I don't, and I never fucking will.



# Chapter Two: The Road to Leviathan

...it is only by sacrificing everything to the senses' pleasure that this individual, who never asked to be cast into this universe of woe, that this poor creature who goes under the name of Man, may be able to sow a smattering of roses atop the thorny path of life.

- The Marquis de Sade, To Libertines

It is loud in the club, so loud that everything blurs into a screen of indistinguishable sounds below the beats. The boy accompanies the witness he has sworn to protect from the anger of a local gang into the bathroom when the urge of bladder overcomes the urge for survival. After checking the bathroom out himself, the boy admits the witness to that bathroom, convinced that the empty room holds no terrors for them.

From nowhere, the gang enforcers come, their footsteps hooded by the pounding beat. The shadow they emerge from was empty moments earlier. With the skill of butchers at their trade, they drop the boy and his witness to the floor. Those two young men never see it coming. Barring the door with a graffitied ward, the enforcers proceed to lay the boy and his witness on the cold and sticky floor, secure their limbs, and flay the two young men open with surgical skill. There is surprisingly little blood. At first.

The witness begins the procedure with a steady stream of negative proclamations. The enforcers display to him his organs, still functioning, and the flayed sheets of what had been his precious skin. The witness begins to talk. He talks a lot. He tells them what they want to know. Repeatedly. Information is not what these men came for, though. They have what they came for in their hands.

The boy wonders why his limbs will not work. Why his voice remains silent. Why the floor beneath him has grown stickier and an unnerving shade of dark. He does not see the surgeons at work beside him, but he feels the pounding pulse of the music in the club and the warmth of something wet against his face. Voices blend into a symphony of angels wrapped within the beat.

Outside, their companions laugh and bellow jokes above the beat, presuming the witness and the boy have finally relieved not only their bladders but also the sexual tension everyone sensed between them. All friends agree that they should be left alone to have their fun. After all, that room was empty. What could possibly be wrong?

The enforcers keep the two young men from seeing one another. Each demand to the contrary is met with assurances that all is well. Finally, the gang enforcers acquiesce to those demands, having removed the boy's stillworking eyes from the bag in which they'd been placed after their quick removal from the boy's head.

It is loud in the club. But not loud enough, this time, to completely disguise the sounds made by the two young men when they see what has been done.

When their friends, concerned, arrive, the two young men are alone, in sections on the floor, both somehow still alive... and, despite the damage, grinning.

# The Atrocity of Light



Imagine darkness.

Not the modern conception of a night sky illuminated by millions of electric lights, but the absence of light. A darkness *before* light, wherein the existence of light is an affront to the dark.

Imagine a blast of light so bright and sudden that it rips the darkness into shadows. From an Absolute, there are now Two. Divided. Opposed. Where one goes, the

other cannot follow.

To Darkness, Light is an atrocity. The end of perfection and the genesis of pain.

It's been said that the Creator cast demons down from his heaven, but what if the opposite were true?

Suppose it was the Light that shattered Darkness, turning Void into Substance and Substance into Form? And with that Form, eternal suffering began?

What if the Big Bang was an atrocity?

Which element, from that perspective, committed evil? The Darkness, by being whole, or the Light, by bringing division to that whole?

It's an abstract question, obviously — the sort of thing mages argue about when they've got nothing else to do.

To the Nephandi, though, that inversion is profound. Because where other mages see themselves as heroic forces of progress and stability, the Fallen see themselves as incarnations of the Void — the blackness that, before the Light, was All.

It's not Darkness, to this view, that's malevolent.

It's Light, and all the suffering it brings.

#### A Path of Pain

Suffering. Injury. Injustice. Rage. They're flagstones on the Nephandic Path. Although people Descend for many reasons, the core of their philosophy always features elements of abuse. The Fallen One feels constrained to the point of violence by some cosmic injustice, and so she's fully justified in fighting back with every tool at her command. The stars aren't aligned, the gods are malign, and so that person makes the choice to rebel in a metaphysical explosion of free will.

#### Evil Paradigms

Mages, Fallen and otherwise, build their magickal Arts from belief-systems which seem strong and valid enough to change their world. Obviously, people find Nephandic paradigms evil; obviously, the Fallen disagree.

No matter what anyone else believes about them, Nephandi don't just whip their magicks up out of "Evil, because evil!" No matter how abhorrent their deeds might be, the beliefs behind those deeds make perfect sense to the Nephandus in question. And so, for a collection of Nephandic Paradigms, see Chapter Five, page XX.

Old Rush song quotes aside, the distinction between the idealistic factions of the Traditions, the Disparates, the Technocracy, and even (in certain regards) the Marauders, and their Fallen rivals is deceptively simple: Those first few factions — despite their infinite atrocities — strive to do what they think is right. The Fallen, on the other hand (the Left one, perhaps?) have chosen to do the opposite of right.

In an odd way, they still feel they're right. And in even odder ways, they're not exactly wrong. People who define cosmic forces in terms of the Metaphysic Trinity (see Mage 20, p. 25 and pp. 44-45) of Dynamism (change), Stasis (stability), and Entropy (decay), plus the Balance between them and the Infinity beyond them, view all those elements as essential to Creation. You can't have, as the argument goes, one without the others. From that perspective, a rousing argument could be made that the Nephandi fulfil an essential part of that cosmic interplay.

Mages love rousing arguments of that sort.

There's just one problem:

The Nephandi do *truly* evil shit. On purpose. In the name of their Enlightenment.

And that evil hurts everyone involved. Even, though many would deny it, the Nephandi themselves.

### Malice Aforethought: On the Nature of Evil



What is evil? Because you can't discuss, much less understand, the Fallen unless you first approach the topic of evil, let's tackle that question now.

As a foundation, let's assume the word evil refers to things that are malignant, malicious, malevolent... that is, things which cause harm and suffering, usually for their own sake. In many languages, the words associated with evil presume a certain level of

intent. If a tree falls on my house, that's bad luck; if you cut the tree so that it falls on my house, you're being evil. Evil spirits, of course, might cause the tree to fall on my house. Either way, dammit, there's a tree on my damn house, and that tree is evil.

Philosophers, artists and theologians have spent millennia debating the existence of evil. Certain people, most infamously Friedrich Nietzsche, argue that the whole concept of "evil" is ignorant, outdated, and dangerously constraining.

Others, like C. S. Lewis, plant good and evil in a specifically theological context, while still others, like Howard Bloom, insist that "evil" is a cultural label applied in order to advance, protect or justify ideas and societies. Although Nietzsche and his other descendants make eloquent arguments in favor of evil as the expression of an inferior person's dismay when faced by a superior person who's gone "beyond good and evil," there's nothing morally neutral about the Nephandi. Even Anton LaVey, the Nietzsche-cribber behind the Church of Satan, maintained that certain activities and behaviors are reprehensible.

Nephandi, by definition, are dedicated to the embrace and pursuit of evil. They did not create it, of course, and they're certainly not behind all the evils of the world. The Fallen *do*, however, enhance, perpetrate, and exploit evil whenever possible. By encouraging evil, they hasten their goal of global Descent.

Without going into a long tangent about those various debates, we can sum up general definitions of "evil" below:



Chapter Two: The Road to Leviathan

#### Natural Evil

A spider and a fly could, if they were able, share a spirited debate about evil. For the spider, starving to death is evil; for the fly, spending the last few moments of your life trapped in a web while a spider eats you is evil. To us, that's just the way the world works — an endless cycle of *natural evils* in which life feeds on death and death gives way to life.

In natural evil, there's no element of choice involved. The spider doesn't torture the fly out of cruelty, just feeds in a rather terrifying way because that's the only way it can feed. The tornado doesn't intentionally wipe out a trailer park in order to make those people suffer; it's a wind, they're in the way, and while the results feel evil on the receiving end, that's not due to malice on the tornado's part. Although social non-human animals are capable of a certain amount of discretion about how cruel they choose to be or not be, a cat is a carnivore and unless he eats other animals (or the processed remnants provided by human caregivers), that cat will die. The cat can choose to kill quickly or slowly, but the cat has no choice about his menu.

Some Nephandi, especially those holding primalist or social-predator paradigms, like to consider themselves agents of natural evil. But they're not. The spider and the cat are simply being what nature has made them to be. The Fallen choose to be what they intentionally become.

#### Alien Evil

At an extreme level, the implacability of natural evil makes it malignant on a human scale. H. P. Lovecraft's Old Ones aren't

#### Jung, Evil, and the Shadow

Psychology pioneer Carl Jung popularized, if not innovated, the concept of *the shadow*: The aspects of a person so awful in that person's mind that they get forced into the darkness of fearful, possibly violent, denial.

Cultures, too, have shadows, and those shadows tend to manifest in the terrible behavior of people and cultures who refuse to see those aspects of themselves, project those aspects onto somebody else instead, and then act out those very things they fear so badly.

The entire Ascension War is a "shadow war" in this regard, with a bunch of mages killing each other (and lots of innocent people, too) over things they're guilty of doing themselves. As pointed out by our Nephandic narrator in the previous chapter, the Fallen feel a certain smug superiority over their rivals because at least they're not in denial about that fact.

For more about this subject, see "Jung's Long Shadow" in Chapter Four, page XX.

horrifying because they choose to behave with cruelty — they're horrifying because they don't give enough of a shit to care. Alien evil suggests entities whose existence and moral compass are so far from our own that they perpetrate evil without actual intention. They're cosmic spiders and we're not even flies. The ruin they bring on us doesn't come from a desire to harm humanity — it comes from not even recognizing us as worthy of desire.

In Mage, entities like the Ramaas Kaa (pp. XX) personify alien evil. They'll bond with Nephandi for their own reasons, and also destroy those Nephandi for those same reasons. To us, that looks like evil, madness, or both; to them, we don't even register as anything more than momentary diversions... if even that much.

# Metaphysical (or Theological) Evil

Some gods are good. Some gods are bad. The line between Good and Evil in terms of metaphysical or theological evil is based largely on which god you prefer. Though certain distinctions between the two concepts exist — metaphysical evil generally refers to malignant cosmic forces embodied by spirits and gods, while theological evil tends to refer to religious doctrines about what is good and what is evil — this sort of evil presumes the existence of intentionally malevolent forces beyond human choice, and it asserts that human morality is a projection of godly mortality.

(That's not even getting into what philosophers call "the problem of evil": Why does evil exist if a benevolent god is in control? That's a whole other discussion, and while a Celestial Chorister could go on for hours about that topic, it's a waste of time where the Fallen are concerned.)

In the World of Darkness, metaphysical evil is a given. Such malevolent forces exist, period, and anyone who thinks otherwise is provably wrong. Theological evil is a much stickier situation, because gods - as our Nephandic tour guide proclaims in Chapter One – do and command terrible things... atrocities that are considered "good" if your god told you to do them. The Lord described in Leviticus might enjoy the smell of burning flesh, but the animals do not enjoy being sacrificed, bled out, and set on fire. Odin might find a blood eagle awesome, but the guy getting his lungs pulled out through a hole in his back has a different perspective. Throughout human history, people have committed the vilest atrocities imaginable on other human beings in the name of our gods, and then bragged about how virtuous they are for doing it. Of all the spurs that drive a Nephandus toward the Cauls, the most common one comes from just how abominable people can be when they think a god is on their side.

Metaphysical and theological evil also become weapons used by spiritual authorities against their own people. A god proclaims (through scripture, clergy, prophecies, whatever) that such-and-such a thing is evil; the god and his representatives determine what is and is not evil, and what they say, goes. In

the case of metaphysical evil, they may be absolutely right; that malignant spirit who wants to trick and torment you does not have your best interests at heart. Theological evil is the sort of thing that gets heretics burnt alive "for the common good" by priests whose church later winds up concealing the child porn its own sex-denied priests shot on church grounds, under the church's protection, while blaming the children for the whole situation because premarital sex outside the sanctity of marriage is evil.

For a perfect example of that sort of evil twisting around to bite its own tail, see how the various Hebrew words later translated as *abominable* in the Bible refer, in Hebrew, to dietary, class, cultural and medical distinctions. When compressed into a single word from a totally different language and cultural context, however, those passages inspire a Christian parent to cite scripture while beating the life out of his queer child for violating Iron-Age Hebrew health codes. And *that?* Now, *that's* abominable.

Which brings us to...

#### Cultural Evil

Human cultures slap the word *evil* on things and people they don't want to have around. "Those people" are evil because they're not us. And because they're evil, they're not *human*, either, so you can feel free to do evil things to them because they deserve it. Because Evil.

Thanks to cultural evil, a nation can bomb another nation into ruins and feel good about doing it because the people they were bombing are obviously evil. There may or may not be a religious gloss thrown over it ("Muslims are evil," "Christians are evil," etc.), but the evil comes from the people of one culture fearing that the people of another culture are evil enough to deserve having evil things done to them.

This sort of thing gets circular in a hurry.

Cultural evil is an ethics-based gatekeeper: Such-and-such is wrong because we don't like it and we say it's wrong, so if you want to be part of this society then don't do this thing. It gets subdivided so heavily between subcultures within cultures that it soon becomes impossible to avoid tripping over ethical landmines even within the same culture. Especially in the social-media era, people threaten, harass, and destroy people for violating a cultural opinion of evil... thus doing evil things in order to punish evil. Whether or not you agree that those evil things were justified because the person on the receiving end is evil depends a great deal on your perspective within that society. To the person on the receiving end, it feels like evil.

Like theological evil, cultural evil keeps people within a society in line, often punishing themselves with suffering simply because they feel they've broken the rules of their society. The anorexic teen fears being considered fat because to her brain, *fat* is evil, but also fears having her anorexia revealed because society tells her *anorexia* is evil. She's doing more harm to herself than anyone else is doing to her (although

#### Cartoon Evil and Realistic Evil

When working with Nephandi, a **Mage** Storyteller can favor two distinct approaches:

- Cartoon evil is larger-than-life and twice as obvious. Pentacle-encrusted villains cackle their way across landscapes of heavy-metal cover art. Spells are big and flashy, demons abound, and the bad guys behave in fairly stupid ways. This approach is best for players who want entertaining diversions with clear moral lines and relative freedom from disturbing content. Early Mage books favored this approach.
- Realistic evil is uncomfortable as hell and rooted in atrocities people actually commit. Moral ambiguity rules the day, but the darkest crimes are really fucking dark. Anyone can be evil here, and hopeful defiance is hard to maintain. This approach works for players who feel able and willing to face vicarious trauma in the name of entertainment. Mage 20 books favor that approach; this one certainly does.

A combination of both extremes is possible, too. The results could involve thematic whiplash, though, so it's often best to choose one or the other, or find a middle ground, based on what you and your group desire. **Mage** is a game, of course, and so even a realistic-evil approach should be, to some degree, enjoyable to play.

her father's remarks about "fat girls" and the tips from that pro-ana website aren't exactly blameless), and although nothing involved in the situation would read as "evil" to the average person, harm and suffering are certainly involved.

We can stick that same tag on deeds that are malignant to the people on the receiving end of them, and essentially non-issues to the people perpetrating them. Most folks who like chocolate don't think about the slaves on the other side of the world — many of whom are children — who labor under threat of pain or death if they don't meet their daily quota of cacao beans. Such slavery is evil when you think about it, but most people simply don't.

What does all this have to do with Nephandi? We're getting there.

Nietzsche, Rand, LaVey, and others of similar philosophy assert that cultural evil is a binder placed on superior people by inferior people. A Nephandus would certainly agree with that idea. It's provably true that social ethics get used to bludgeon people into conformity; it's also provably true that people who reject popular concepts of evil (or embrace them) can commit hideous acts that cause pain and suffering, and thus commit evil whether they agree with the idea or not.

#### Psychopath, Sociopath, Narcissist or Fallen?

Over the last several decades, psychologists and criminologists have noted a personality type that appears to possess a clinical lack of empathy. Whether or not this reflects a neurological condition, a mental illness, social malformation or some other internal situation is open to debate. The terminology defining that condition is debatable too, even among experts and people with that condition; Hare and his collaborators refer to such people as psychopaths, while Martha Stout calls them sociopaths. The DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition) refuses to name either condition, referring to it instead as Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD). Mage 20, in its section about Derangements (pp. 649-650), favors that third option. In any case, the condition might or might not involve violent or criminal behavior, and it remains beyond the control of the person with that condition.

According to many books and essays on the subject, the "disorder" element involves behavior, not the lack of empathy itself. A person with that condition may be a brain surgeon, a lawyer, a pilot – cool-headed to an apparently inhuman degree but putting that condition to a socially positive use. Though it's common to refer to cruel or violent people as "psychopaths," the internal conditions involved remain more complicated than the simple, loaded word.

Certain theories consider clinical sociopathy to be a sensory-processing condition similar to dyslexia, autism or synesthesia (wherein a person's brain processes external stimuli in unconventional and possibly disruptive ways), while others tie it to abuse trauma, chemical imbalances, or disassociation from mainstream impressions of reality. A few outliers even consider it an evolutionary adaptation, in which the sociopath is the harbinger of the next stage of human existence. In any case, the person has a condition that's probably beyond their control. They might be able to choose how they deal with it, but they didn't choose to have it in the first place.

As Raven Bond (a ritual magician who was also a psychotherapist) put it, the terms "disorder" and "disease" reflect a condition that causes problems. A person can have an unconventional perspective on the world without being disordered or diseased; if that condition leads to physical, mental, social, and / or legal damage, however, it's considered a disorder or disease. From a professional perspective, those terms do not reflect a moral judgment, just a matter of effects. A person can suffer from a mental illness without being a criminal; a severe mental illness, however, can make that person a danger to themselves and to other folks around them.

In neither case does the disease make the person into a Nephandus.

#### A Spectrum of Severity

As with current understandings about autism, current theories about psychopathy / sociopathy / ASPD posit a spectrum of severity. (Please note that the discussions of both conditions are subject to change). Unlike autism, ASPD refers to an inability to feel empathy, while people on the autistic spectrum tend to feel empathy to an overwhelming degree.

At the high-functioning end of the clinical sociopathy spectrum, a person with that condition has a hard time understanding the emotional consequences their actions have on others, but can learn and mimic enough social cues to get by without much trouble in mainstream human society.

Further along the spectrum, a person with ASPD masks that condition with superficial charm which they employ to manipulate people into being their victims, apologists, and co-conspirators.

At the most radical extreme, the condition breeds a clinical disregard for everything and everyone around the person; everything becomes a loss/gain situation, and everyone is a potential target of that person's whims. Such people rarely last long in society, and generally wind up dead or in confinement by adulthood unless they adopt a niche within society (sniper, torturer, assassin, etc.) that rewards them for clinical applications of criminality. Even among armies and the underworld, such extreme cases scare the living crap out of their comrades because those folks know the person with that level of disorder could turn on them as ruthlessly as they turn on enemies.

A common (but not universal) distinction between psychopath and sociopath involves the behavior of the person with that condition. Under this distinction, a psychopath could be a person with the condition who enjoys the amount of damage they cause, while a sociopath could be someone who lacks an innate understanding of other people's pain but generally tries to "do the right thing" unless there's some profit to be gained from being ruthless instead. According to certain resources, of course, those distinctions differ: a psychopath is someone with a mental illness that drives them to terrible things, while a sociopath chooses to manipulate and destroy people just because she can. Still other sources claim that "sociopathy" isn't a neurological condition at all, merely, a set of social values that differs from the social values of mainstream society; a 16th-century samurai, for example, would be considered a sociopath in modern Japan because he would feel that killing commoners and boiling people alive was perfectly reasonable behavior for someone in his social class.

Like I said, this topic gets complex, and the more you research it, the more contradictions you discover. By whatever name and definition, psychopathy/ sociopathy/ ASPD as a field of inquiry is very much a work-in-progress whose controversial study extends a few decades at best. Back in the old days, this condition would simply make you a warlord, an enforcer, a corpse, or perhaps even a saint.

But still not a Nephandus.

Complicating matters further, the condition of narcissism assumes that the person in question is so self-focused that every other person in their world becomes a secondary instrument to their own desires. To a degree, we all have this "hero of our own story" thing going on; a true narcissist, however, views other folks as instruments to use, background to ignore, or obstacles to destroy. Again, certain theories view this disorder as a spectrum, with low-end people being selfish but rarely malicious, and others being malevolent simply because it profits them. If combined with ASPD (a combination that certain authorities consider to be a single extreme disorder, not two related ones), a sociopathic narcissist can become the worst kind of person imaginable.

#### **Mental Condition or Metaphysical Behavior?**

So, the big question: Does a person with this condition, if Awakened, becomes a Nephandus?

A neurological condition is not a conscious choice.

A mage with ASPD might choose to become a Nephandus, but the Nephandic Path is not a metaphysical case of ASPD. Falling, in the Nephandic sense of that term, demands a deliberate choice of behavior and philosophy, not merely a neurological quirk. Nephandic Descent involves a conscious intention to abandon empathy in favor of enlightenment... or at least whatever passes for enlightenment within that Fallen mage's mind.

#### "Sociopathy Chic"

Distinctly different from clinical sociopathy, the behavior sometimes referred to as "sociopathy chic" isn't a quirk of neurobiology at all. Instead, it's a conscious rejection of empathy, not because the person involved cannot comprehend the emotional consequences of her actions but because he simply doesn't give a shit. Empathy's for losers, so cruelty defines a winner. A clinical sociopath hasn't made a deliberate choice to feel the way she does; the person who embraces sociopathy chic has made, and continues to make, the choice to be that way.

Often encouraged by personal and cultural factors, sociopathy chic asserts that cruelty is cool. A step beyond mere callousness (in which a person rejects empathy for others and simply regards them as "those people," not "real people"), sociopathy chic moves from indifference to hostility... and then often goes a step or two further on general principle. The person who pretends not to notice the homeless guy sleeping in the doorway is callous; the person who stages "bum fights" and then posts them online is cruel; the person who stages them for profit, adds a mocking commentary to the videos, puts together compilation videos, and then claims "free enterprise" and "freedom of speech" to defend the whole thing is practicing sociopathy chic.

As a short visit to almost any internet video site shows (especially if you read the comments), sociopathy chic is a hot commodity these days.

And the Nephandus? He's staging lethal bum fights, setting fire to the winners, making videos of their deaths and posting them online with laugh tracks and funny music, then selling "special collector's editions" videos of the whole thing on the dark web while encouraging other folks to do that too...just because they can. "Come on," he tells them. "It'll be fun."

Social evil, often combined with theological evil, justifies dehumanization. Dehumanization, in turn, justifies atrocity. Bullying, bigotry, domestic violence, rape, torture, terrorism, slavery, murder, mass murder, war, genocide... all of them originate from concepts of cultural evil. Animal cruelty falls into this category, too — they're just animals, so it's not like they're people; shove a funnel down that duck's mouth and force feed it until it dies (note the word "it"), because foie gras tastes yummy, and it's a traditional food, and if those damn animal-rights terrorists would just stop bitching about it because it's just a dumb animal...

You see where this is heading.

Cultural evil is the best friend the Nephandi ever had. With it, they can do horrible things to people, convince people to do horrible things to one another, feel good about doing it, convince themselves that the recipients of those terrible things deserved it because those recipients are evil, and thereby spread an ever-growing pool of anguish, misery, distrust, and self-deception.

#### Circumstantial Evil

Was Jean Valjean evil? Javert certainly thought so. Was Javert evil? Lots of people think so. Circumstantial evil weighs the definition of evil by the circumstances involved. If Jean Valjean steals a loaf of bread from a poor merchant who can't afford the theft, then Valjean is an asshole; if he steals it to save his starving child, most folks are willing to look the other way unless they're Inspector Javert.

To avert tangents about humanistic French literature (much less about "evil" as defined within humanistic vs. theological philosophies), let's just say that Mage's Ascension War is rooted in circumstantial evils. The HIT Mark is evil if he's blowing up your Chantry; the Reality Deviants in that Chantry are evil if they've been selling heroin to kids.

Mage is full of relativistic circumstantial evil. Nephandi (and their fans) love pointing that out. But the reason all Mage factions — even the Marauders — regard Nephandi as shoot-on-sight evil is because the Fallen embrace...

#### Personal Evil

I robbed your house because it was fun.

I shot your kid because it was fun.

I'm wiping out humanity and laughing all the way to hell because it's fun.

That's personal evil: The deliberate, intentional choice to inflict harm and suffering for their own sake. And because it's fun.

That's the Nephandic ideal: Descent. Willfully, intentionally, consciously, causing harm and suffering, and shifting Reality toward a Consensus where inescapable harm and suffering drive humanity to blow its collective brains out.

Because it's fun.

#### The Death of Empathy

Empathy, "the ability to understand and share the feelings of another," is the speedbump of evil. Among social animals — including human ones, and spirits may feel it, too — the ability to sense another being's pain may prevent one animal from harming another unless that harm is necessary for food, protection, and so forth, and often inspire one to hesitate even if it is necessary.

Without empathy, the bonds that keep a social species from wiping itself out unravel. Human societies make laws to reinforce those bonds, and gods command their people to follow divine mandates against destroying your own kind. Although empathy rests heavily on the definition of "your own kind" (love thy neighbor but kill thine enemies), it's the bedrock of the social contracts which keep humanity alive.

Personal evil demands the death of empathy. If you can relate to another being's pain, then you'll probably hesitate to cause more pain unless you're in so much pain that you can't feel *their* pain too.

Nephandi kill the shit out of empathy, and they strive to get other people to kill empathy, too. Without empathy, those troublesome social contracts that keep us from self-extinction disappear.

Which is exactly what the Nephandic endgame is: Extinction.

As we'll see momentarily, many Fallen mages just want to seize self-godhood and let the rest of the world suffer without them. Global Descent, on the other hand, seeks to wipe out the entire world, perhaps Creation as a whole, because that world deserves Oblivion.

People do harmful things, and cause suffering, for all kinds of reasons. It takes a certain mindset, though, to deliberately, and with malice aforethought, cause harm and suffering for the sake of causing harm and suffering.

And that's what the Nephandic mindset is.

They will justify it with philosophy, wrap it in metaphysics, use culture, religion, and their own suffering as whipping boys (another example, incidentally, of a cultural evil) to absolve themselves of responsibility, and then commit all manner of atrocities because it's fun to just watch the world burn.

#### Descent: Ascension of the Fall



Ascension is literally the name of the game. Although many mages pursue their own agendas, the ultimate goal of Awakening, at least in theory, involves Ascension. To some mages, Ascension is a personal matter in which an individual person transcends human limitations and achieves some sort of higher state. For others, Ascension is a global goal, for which all Sleepers will someday Awaken toward a common state of excellence and transform

this flawed world into something greater than before.

Mages fight wars over these ideals and, while doing so, make their world measurably worse, which is what happens when folks with power get too convinced they're doing the right thing.

Still, Ascension is, at least in theory, a higher state of existence.

What happens if your vision of Ascension heads the opposite direction?

#### The Caul: Dark Ecstasy of Falling

To break through limitations. To hurl one's self into the Abyss. To forsake the Path presented and endure the Path of choice. These meanings, among others, reflect the Fall. Although the name echoes — intentionally — the majestic Fall of Lucifer and his legions of rebel angels, the Nephandic moniker "the Fallen Ones" has richer significance than that.

All Nephandi, in a specific sense, Fall. That plunge is the thing that distinguishes them most from their rival mages: The Caul's embrace and the cosmic freefall that results. As discussed below and detailed further in Chapter Four (pp. XX.), the Caul provides a gateway from the mortal world to the forbidden Tree of Knowledge often called the *Qlippoth*. Where the Kabbalistic Tree of Life metaphorically grows *up*, the Tree of Knowledge grows *down*. The Caul provides a vortex into the Abyss of Daath, during which the inner spirit of that person is transformed through

spiritual alchemy and invested with Qlippothic energies. From that moment onward, a Nephandus becomes a living, walking "broken vessel" — an aspect of Qlippothic existence embodied in a human form. Although this Fall is metaphysical, not literal, the sense of vertiginous freefall resembles the ecstasy of plunging endlessly through a darkening sky toward a destination of hard truths rather than hard ground.

To other mages, of course, especially those of monotheistic inclinations, the Fall represents a moral decline from angelic aspirations to devilish behavior. That impression isn't *incorrect*, exactly — it's an accurate reflection of the Fallen attitude. Still, the moralistic tone used by other mages is not the reason Nephandi favor that term for themselves. For those who cherish the Abyssal dive, the phrase recalls the fond moment when they threw obedience to hell and determined, for the rest of at least one lifetime, the freedom of their own choice.

#### Personal Descent: Attainment of Leviathan

Revenge. Power. Wisdom. Bliss. Such motivations drive certain Nephandi toward personal Descent. For them, the rest of the world can go to hell on its own terms. They choose instead to pursue individual destiny — to, as the narrator put

in in Chapter One, to escape the farm, strike out on her own, and perhaps even kill, eat, and become a god.

Personal Descent might involve working toward greater ruin for the world at large. More often, though, it's a Path dedicated to hedonistic excess, occult wisdom, magickal power, and vindication in the face of a world that has (at least as far as the Fallen One is concerned) abused and confined the mage until now. Sure, Nephandi pursuing personal Descent can, and often *do*, work together to make this world a nastier place, if only because... as mentioned earlier... it's fun. The end goal, however, involves the transformation from a flawed mortal in a flawed world to what's often called the "Black Diamond": The gleaming perfection of a self-made god.

# Leviathan: Assumption and Consummation

Among the Fallen, such pursuits are often called *the Road to Leviathan*, the Path of the Primordial Beast. By exploring such roads past the point of law, sanity, and self-preservation, a Nephandic magus and his allies forsake the travesties of virtue and seize the tools of ultimate godhood. Along the way, he subdues, seduces, and subverts the lesser beings he encounters. Essentially, he trains himself to be pitiless and cruel in order to drive all weakness from within himself while feeding on the weakness of our world.



Chapter Two: The Road to Leviathan

The Road to Leviathan has no place for sympathy or pity. One takes what one wills, not merely because he can but because it is his moral right, as a superior being, to do so.

At the culmination of this Road, Nephandic legends say, the questing magus attains the final vessel: The Qlipha of Thaumiel, realm of ultimate dark majesty. There, a voyager who has faced and overcome every obstacle reaches out to seize the key to his new state of existence. If successful, it has been said, one of two things might happen:

Assumption, a state of perfect union where the Nephandus and the Void become one. In this state of unholy union, the Fallen One returns to the Absolute and gets absorbed back into the primordial essence of pre-Light non-existence.

Or, according to other Fallen Litanies, he may enjoy...

The Consummation of Leviathan, the symbolic (perhaps even literal) feast where a person seeking godhood devours that essence and attains a new, far greater state.

In classical legend, Leviathan is the Great Serpent Demon, "king over all proud beasts." His name, in Hebrew, means "twisted in folds," and refers to something bound together in ways that make it strong and whole. Coiled in the depths of the seas and boiling to the top occasionally to feast on the light of the world, Leviathan embodies the primal energies of nature unbound by faith or reason. "None is so fierce," according to the book of Job, "that dare stir him up." Pre-biblical tradition refers to Leviathan as Lotan, the seven-headed serpent of chaos. Although gods keep claiming to beat him down and serve him up as a feast for their faithful, Leviathan remains immortal, impassable, and ultimately – at least in the eyes of Nephandi-triumphant. Symbolically, Leviathan represents the dark abyss of seas and space. And so, in a symbolic way, most Nephandi aspire to become like Leviathan: Vast, implacable, unknowable, and unstoppable.

#### Global Descent: Extinction of Reality

Bring it all down. That's the goal of global Descent. Where other mages aspire to make the world a better place, these Nephandi aspire to put it out of its misery. Some view this as a feast for the legendary Dark Masters, while others seek humanity's extinction...preferably through bloody self-destruction.

Contempt for the mortal world (and all the Umbral worlds as well) is a fixture of the Fallen Path. A Nephandus might seem compassionate and kind, may even still harbor such so-called weaknesses within her as she goes along the Path. Ultimately, though, a Fallen One — regardless of whether her quest seeks personal or global Descent — holds humanity and all its works in utter contempt. It could be that the Qlippoth's resentment at its fate simmers through the living vessels of itself; or maybe they just hate the world for their own reasons, always have, and always will. Whatever personal reasons a Fallen magus holds, her disgust with our flawed and fragile world (probably with herself as well, for remaining part of that world despite herself) underscores the old name for her kind: The Eaters of the Weak.

#### Those Who Dwell Behind the Stars

There are bigger things than humanity out there. Far bigger things. Also known as Those Beyond, the entities known within Nephandic ranks as Those Who Dwell Behind the Stars are gods of the Eternal Void. Rumors claim they were once Eaters of the Weak who attained Qlippothic godhood and claimed dominion of self-created universes. Perhaps they're far older entities instead. In any case, Nephandic lore and prophecy claims that Those Who Dwell Behind the Stars will emerge someday from the Void, extinguish the rapacious rebel Light, and return the cosmos to eternal, primal Absolute.

#### The Void: Triumphant Absolute

Whichever destination they prefer, the Fallen aspire toward a return to *the Absolute*: the Primordial Void that, according to their myths, preceded our existence and wants to take everything back.

Whether or not the Absolute is a spiritual state, a physical state, a pandimensional state, or even a living thing depends upon which Fallen One you ask...and really, if you're expecting a straight and honest answer to that question (or, for that matter, to any other question), then you're trusting too much in someone whose defining characteristic is that she cannot truly be trusted for anything except the pursuit of her own agenda.

#### Dark Fools: The Path of Descent

All mages have a Path. They might not always pursue it consciously or make it all the way to a satisfying end, but like the fool in the tarot journey detailed in Chapter One of Mage 20, the Awakened tread a metaphysical road of events and revelations that could lead toward stasis, ruin, or Ascension.

From an outside view, the Fallen have already lost the Path. They plunge off the edge of the cliff and wind up chained to

the Devil while the rest of the world goes by. The common perception of Nephandi as slaves to Otherworldly Dark Masters assumes that the Eaters of the Weak are themselves too weak to transcend their situation.

And that perception, while not always wrong, isn't exactly right. The Fallen have ideals as well. They're not pretty and, as we just saw, they're as evil as evil can be. But why are they

evil? What ideal draws toward darkness and destruction, especially if those people are, by definition, Enlightened in a cosmic sense?

#### Awareness

To start with the obvious: These people, even before Awakening, are pretty fucked up.

Happy, secure, heathy people (assuming such people exist to begin with) do not become magickal predators. For whatever reason, the pending Nephandus holds a grim view of life long before she encounters a Caul. Maybe she's a refugee from a figurative or literal war zone; or devoted to self-destruction by any means available; she could be a clinical sociopath, but more likely she's just a person like anybody else, whose life has been filled with so much damage that she wants to return the favor. An abusive religious upbringing? A ravaged society? Intimate violation on so many levels that it demands eternal retribution on a world and gods that would let such things happen? Each Nephandus has a story, and the common ingredient is pain. Awareness, for such mages, is the sense that reality is intolerable and must be destroyed. Awakening, when it comes (as detailed below), solidifies a vengeful, predatory urge that was in place long before the Avatar spoke.

For many Nephandi, awareness also includes their entry to a different Path: An occult interest, a family tradition, a career in art or advanced sciences or unconventional subcultures, religious or spiritual training...in short, the usual methods through which Awakened people first experience the greater potential of their existence. But although the Fallen mage might begin as a member of some other sect (see "Barabbi," below), her background — no matter how innocuous that initial sect might be — also features significant levels of abuse and the early lure of...

#### The Nightside

We all crave things we're not supposed to have or do. Most of us sort through all that without becoming living engines of metaphysical abuse, and a fair number of Awakened mages pursue such things in safer, saner, more principled ways. Ecstatics, Verbenae, Thanatoics of course, and many other mages besides often feel drawn to the darker side of town — the places "good people" do not go. While certain folks head toward the opposite extreme (becoming Choristers, healers, and other "white light" mages), the urge toward disreputable pastimes is a common draw for people (and mages) of all kinds.

The Fallen just get drawn in a whole lot deeper.

The Nightside (detailed in Chapter Four, pp. XX) can make itself known at any age, and while most folks resist its deeper levels, or find better, safer ways to pursue them without Falling, the call toward that forsaken state often begins in childhood. That's not to say that "bad seed" children are aspiring Fallen Ones; if for no reason other than the childhood lack of social and physical development, a child cannot be abusive in the ways that adults understand that term. Even as kids, however,

potential Nephandi feel drawn toward excess, viciousness, and pain.

Everyone rebels to some degree. Extremity, though, is a hallmark of the Nightside. Where another person might shoplift, the budding Nephandus breaks into homes. Most people get into fights as children, but the potential Nephandus might push her brother down the stairs just to watch him bounce. Again, this goes beyond mental illness, though folks will probably tag this person as a psychopath. A person with mental illness or other trauma, though, can still resist or dismiss the urge toward cruelty; the future Nephandus pursues it avidly.

Initiation toward the Nightside comes in many forms: The "wrong crowd," the wrong books or other media, a penchant to test boundaries or drive straight over them, a desire for moody seclusion and self-annihilation. Anything that seems disreputable holds appeal within the Nightside. Again, this appeal itself doesn't mark the Nephandic Path. All Nephandi, though, feel drawn toward darkness even if they don't pursue it at first.

Most abuse survivors, obviously, don't hop into Cauls and turn their souls into Qlippothic storms. There's a lot of broken glass rattling around in there, slashing her vision of reality apart long before the Fall became a possibility, but beyond that there has to be a willingness to lash out at life in general. Where most mages Awaken to their potential to reshape the world in better ways (whatever that idea of "better" might be), the future Fallen One wants to rip the world to shreds.

#### Conflict

Soon enough, she gets her chance. The conflict stage of a mage's Path generally comes after Awakening. In the case of the Fallen, it may well begin at birth. Guided by keen awareness of reality's wretched nature, a future Nephandus lives in a state of war long before the Avatar Awakens. That's especially true for *widderslainte* — people born with twisted Avatars — but every Nephandus grows up fighting with her world.

The stages of initiation and mentorship, again, may precede Awakening. One potential Fallen One discovers the joys of dark occultism, while another learns to fight with her fists. The teenage ordeals of social hierarchy provide fertile ground for initiation, but some Fallen start much earlier than that while others recognize their Path well into adulthood instead. Whatever the specifics are, our would-be Nephandus feels drawn toward disreputable, forbidden, dangerous things.

#### **Authorities**

Regardless of the person's age, that dark hunger leads to conflict: With parents, peers and other agents of authority, communities, religions, the law, even the self. Crime, violence, addiction, attempts at rehab, jail or other forms of "saving your soul" (typically in the most abusive manner possible), perhaps

even extreme religious conversations or pretenses of purity (as demonstrated by the Infernalist GDP Powell in Gods & Monsters, p. 55), the Nightside's gravity pulls a person into all kinds of confrontations, and the results of those conflicts often make the situation worse. By the time she hits adulthood, a potential Nephandus has endured at least a few bust ups with authority, and she hates the world even more as a result.

#### Initiation and Mentorship

Chances are good that a budding Nephandus will encounter her first mentor during those tumultuous years of confrontation and consequences. He might be that cool classmate with the black-metal fascination; she might be the mean girl who's offering a chance to join her clique. Some Nephandi learn the Arts of Pain from abusive parents, clergy, relatives, or strangers. Such mentors seldom understand anything about the Awakened world at all. Pain, however? *That*, they understand. And share. And teach.

At some point of her life, a Nephandus assumes the mentor role herself. Maybe she seduces other mages to Fall; offers challenges to potential apprentices or pawns; drops a copy of *The Thirteenth Hour* into some cute kid's hands to see what he might make of it; or runs social media groups dedicated to cruelty, supremacy, dark occultism, or other possible lures. Through whichever methods work best for her, an experienced Nephandus introduces potential converts to her Path. Most likely, she'll meet someone like that herself before her Fall, and that mentor's encouragement or violation spurs her toward the next level.

#### The Black Arts

Magick, obviously, become a key element of her life. A Fallen mage is still a mage, after all, and the pursuit of magick is as essential to her as breathing is. The key difference, though, between a Nephandus and others of her kind involves the *Black Arts*: an intentionally malignant approach to magick.

Any mage can dance along the Dark Side; hell, most mages employ questionable practices and sinister tools. For the Eaters of the Weak, however, the traditional phrase "Black Arts" reflect their connection to the Void and their dedication to occult predation. Although any smart Nephandus learns how to work quietly and wrap that darkness around apparently innocent pursuits, predatory intentions and malign deeds are pervasive elements of Nephandic Black Arts.

Despite the common stereotype, Fallen Arts rarely involve demonic pacts and Satanic ass-kissing. While those elements are quite traditional, they're also showy, gross, and unnecessary. A modern magus is more likely to use computers than cauldrons, and today's Nephandi are nothing if not adaptable. Most times, medieval-style deviltry gets dusted off for special occasions, or for moments when the Fallen One has nothing to fear from discovery.

Because *barabbi* mages defect from other sects, most Black Arts incorporate twisted versions of the previous sect's tools.

A Fallen Progenitor uses biotech to craft warped servants, grotesque mutations, and near-incurable plagues; the Black Suit *barabbus* retains the combat acumen and disciplines of his previous (and possibly still current) career. Strange machines, dark religions, fearsome pacts with infernal beings... as detailed further in Chapter Five, the Black Arts offer all the flexibility of any modern mage's toolkit. The spectrum of potential focus ranges wide. Whatever beliefs, practices, and tools she employs, though, the Fallen mage specializes in Arts that exploit, manipulate, violate, and destroy.

#### The Qlippoth

A forbidden inversion of cosmic principles, the Qlippoth forms an innate and inescapable element of Nephandic existence. Detailed in Chapter Four, this collection of 10 *Qlipha* ("shells") forms an inverse cosmology whose influence incarnates itself through the Nephandic rebirth in a Caul.

Although the modern concept of this reputed Tree of Knowledge comes from heretical applications of medieval Jewish mysticism (as well as from later occult practitioners who claimed the concept without being themselves Jewish), the Qlippoth essence is itself primordial in ways that its own devotees don't quite understand. Like the Kabbalistic Tree of Life it inverts, the modern perception of the Qlippoth is a metaphysical paradigm, an abstract model of cosmic principles which are far older than Kabbalah or the Qlippoth or humanity itself. While those principles have established a certain astral reality of both Trees (if only because centuries of occultists have poured psychic energy into those paradigms), the essence of the Qlippoth supposedly predates this universe and everything in it.

According to Qlippothic lore, the shells are the ruins of previous existences — universes shattered in the creation process that led to our current cosmos. Though broken and abandoned, these ruins and their inhabitants still exist: hungry, resentful, lustful, aware. Though human occult theories have given them names and identities, those forces are ageless in ways humanity cannot understand. When possible, they reach back into the current universe, possibly to claim it for themselves, more likely to pull it into the Void with them and shatter it in revenge.

Those are desires abuse survivors often understand.

According to Nephandic Litanies, early Nephandi acquired tricks and powers from bestial and spiritual predators. The Portals to Daath and the Qlippothic realms beyond were among those primordial secrets, and the winding passages deep beneath the earth and seas provided many of those forbidden secrets, too. Whatever the origins of the Qlippothic Dominions might be, the Fallen have embodied their essence in this universe ever since.

#### Lex Praedatorious

Long ago, when the first humans clung to fires and trees, hid in caves and feared the greater beasts, some among them

#### Haah'rath Kharoh: The Dragon's Tongue

Demons speak among themselves in no human language. One of the secrets that was passed along to the Night Hunters involved learning to speak as demons do. According to Nephandic tradition, those early demons also sired children and then passed their speech along to their offspring. Known commonly as the Dragon's Tongue, that language wraps sibilants, guttural sounds, harsh consonants, and other cacophony into a hair-raising sonic display. Although most folks know it by its conventional name, those who speak the Dragon's Tongue call it "Haah'rath Kharoh."

Since its early origins, Haah'rath Kharoh has been refined and expanded by the humans who speak it. Elements of human languages have been added to it, although those words rarely sound "normal" when spoken in the Dragon's Tongue. Thus, the primordial language has become a modern form of conversation, albeit one few people would understand as words.

Nephandi conversant in Haah'rath Kharoh incorporate it into their Litanies and spells, partly because it sounds cool, partly because it obscures their meaning from outside ears, and partly because it's a marvelous form of one-upmanship that distinguishes an experienced, knowledgeable Nephandus from some snotty little upstart with a few tricks but no finesse.

As with any other language, Haah'rath Kharoh features many regional and cultural dialects. As a result, many demons cannot understand those Fallen dialects because they lack the proper context for the words even when they understand the sounds being spoken.

According to legend, the Dragon's Tongue corrupts the bodies and minds of people who speak it. Supposedly, it degrades them on a molecular level in addition to having predictable effects on the mind and soul of the speakers. Nephandic parents may pass along that degradation in their DNA as well as through their repugnant parenting practices. Although many Fallen Ones seem perfectly normal despite their knowledge of Haah'rath Kharoh, that might simply reflect their skill with Life, Mind, and Entropy Arts.

Haah'rath Kharoh has written forms too, although these too have regional and cultural variations which render them near-unintelligible to those who haven't been schooled in a given variation. Industrious Basilisks and Goatkids (detailed in the following chapter) have created Dragon's Tongue fonts, which they incorporate into their internet posts, memes, and artwork, thus passing along the language without a context beyond, "Well, that looks cool."

In game terms, the Dragon's Tongue demands the Language Merit. Characters who don't have it cannot understand it at all.

As an optional rule, the language might also manifest as points of permanent Paradox, Physical or Supernatural Flaws, Derangements, or Genetic Flaws (**Mage 20**, Appendix II, pp. 648-651).

refused to be afraid. During what's called *the Predatory Age* (see Mage: The Ascension 20th Anniversary Edition, p. 121), the First Hunters watched the animals that fed on humans, learned their secrets, bargained with their spirits, and took the hunting urge into their hearts. Although their successes kept the people alive, the feral darkness they assumed into themselves scared their kin so badly that the beast-taught people often found themselves cast out, avoided, and unloved unless they brought their predatory skills back into the tribes, not merely to hunt food and secure the tribes, but to rule over them as well.

According to Nephandic lore, those First Hunters learned the secrets of the Qlippoth and its forces from the predators they bargained with and killed. Other stories tell of the Great Race, or of angels and demons who coupled and bargained and warred with early humans. Certain people mastered early versions of maglignant Arts, while others became kin to the beasts and kinfolk to the Changing Breeds. Because certain First Hunters preferred to hunt and live by night rather than by day, they're known in Fallen lore as the Night Hunters. Whether or not any of this stuff is historically true is beside

the point; in the modern era, a Nephandus carries on the Night Hunter traditions of hunting, predation, and the prey.

In medieval times, these traditions were known as *Lex Praedatorious*: The Law of Predation. Although Abyssal Litanies present that Law in many phrasings and rituals, the core of it is simple: "You are a predator, and the world is your prey. Thus, you consume or are consumed." Medieval Fallen took that Law seriously, and old-school Nephandi still do today.

In the modern world, eating people is frowned upon. More to the point, it's a lot harder to get away with than it used to be, although Nephandi living in remote locations or private estates still manage to do it easily. More often, today's Eaters of the Weak employ emotional, social, psychological and energetic cannibalism more often than the literal sort of consumption.

Even without literal cannibalism, each Nephandus knows and follows this one Law. If nothing else, that's self-preservation; when everyone else you know is out to kill and consume you, you can't afford not to do the same.

In terms of one's magickal practice, the "Cannibalism" entry in **The Book of Secrets** (pp. 206-207) explores various

applications of physical and symbolic consumption. The social predation which constitutes the most common form of Lex Praedatorious in the current era can be found later in this chapter in the section Law of Predation: Seduce, Abuse, Corrupt, Destroy (pp. XX).

#### Abyssal Litanies

Like any long-established group (and many younger ones, as well), the Fallen preserve written and oral traditions called *Litanies*. Composed of legends, sagas, epics, rituals, spells, commentaries, biographies, histories, debates, formulae, and other demi-historical esoterica, these Abyssal Litanies provide a sense of identity for a sect often considered to be a bunch of servile morons in black robes.

Though the corpus of surviving Litanies is too vast and private to collect entirely, the Heralds of Basilisk (detailed in Chapter Three) have established several online archives where Abyssal Litanies gets collected, translated, annotated, edited, embellished, and preserved. While this seems like an odd vocation for a group dedicated to ending the world via an internet-bred god, those archives have greatly expanded the extent of information available to the modern Nephandus. There's no way of testing the veracity of the data, of course, but these efforts have already sown seeds for an impressive variety of apocalai so the Heralds must be doing something right.

Abyssal Litanies feature a wide range of languages, often tangled into near-untranslatable mashups of several languages at once. Arabic, Latin, Classical Greek, Sanskrit, French, German, Spanish, and English are perhaps the most common languages among them, although Mandarin, Urdu, Japanese, Swahili, and Egyptian and Sumerian varieties of cuneiform are fairly common, too. In order to read, speak, or understand the Litanies with any sort of competency, a Nephandus must be reasonably fluent in a wide range of communication styles. Thus, the average modern Nephandus has no clue what three-quarters of existing Litany material actually says. Although the Heralds have assumed an extensive translation program (employing human, computer, and demonic methods of translation), the results are often creatively inaccurate. A proper "book-learned" understanding of a language still misses a lot of important cultural context and historical quirks, while the translations assembled by even the most "cooperative" of demons and computers are, at best, dubious.

Although most Nephandic communities (such as they are) maintain their own (possibly extensive) Abyssal Litany collections, those collections are near-incomprehensible for most of the people who tend them and nearly anyone outside that group. The prevalence of secret codes, ciphers, symbolic languages, and so forth involved in such writings — classical and modern alike — make it hard to translate those archives at all, and even harder to do so accurately. That said, the Fallen maintain translation spells (see **Untangle Tongues**, **Lo, It Is Written**, and **Jabberhash** in Chapter Five, pp. XX) which help to some degree even though the results might not be as correct as the translator might like.

For these reasons, among others, outsiders have a *very* hard time understanding Nephandic archives unless the Fallen have — as with the *Malleus Neffandorum* and other such works — gone out of their way to make them both accessible and inevitably misleading. Even Hermetic Tradition scholars, Virtual Adept cryptography apps, and Technocratic translation programs have little hope of deciphering Nephandic materials if the Fallen do not want those materials deciphered.

#### The Labyrinths

The things Nephandi do demand secrecy, security, and often preparation. And so, since time immemorial, the Fallen have crafted Labyrinths: hidden lairs where the Eaters of the Weak can celebrate their Path in relative privacy. Essentially a Nephandic Chantry (detailed in Mage 20, pp. 77-78 and 308-309), each Labyrinth suits the dominant mage or circle within that space. Deep woodland groves, corporate retreats, underwater hideouts, perilous cave complexes, mountaintop temples, ancient ruins, any place a Nephandus or three can set up property and shape it to their needs could become a Labyrinth. One Labyrinth might be a lush rural estate with a dazzling garden maze, libraries full of tomes, walls filled with secret passageways, and things in the basement no sane person wants to see; another could be an urban ruin caked in gang graffiti and broken glass, warded by murals that hold magickal protections, and filled with bones from people no one will ever see again.

Although a handful of modern Labyrinths can be found in and around populated areas, the vast majority of them are hidden deep in places where only the right (or wrong) people can find them. The exteriors often seem innocuous, and the interiors initially encountered might be, too. By the time a visitor, prisoner, or trespasser reaches deep into the Labyrinth, however, the surroundings achieve an ominous atmosphere — at which point, escape is virtually impossible for anything less than a military company or a handful of accomplished and furious magi.

As befits a sect of paranormal predators, each Labyrinth, regards of its size or complexity, boasts an impressive array of traps, lures, fake outs, dead ends, enchanted portals, and waste-disposal facilities the local trash collectors would never find. Lex Praedatorious racks up an impressive mess, after all, and all those remains must wind up somewhere. Most Labyrinths feature rooms for living, relaxing, and torturing people, and even the smallest of them constitutes at least a Sanctum (Mage 20, pp. 76-77 and 323-324) if not a full-fledged Chantry. A sample Labyrinth called Club Maelstrom can be found in Chapter Six (pp. XX-XX), and although inexperienced Fallen mages rarely have such facilities at their disposal, upper-echelon ones typically have at least one such place to call home.

#### Rivals

At some point, before or after her Awakening, each Nephandus runs across rival mages, Night-Folk, hunters, and other parties with understandably ill intent. Most Nephandi



wind up in such rivalries with one another, too — the predator-prey dynamic doesn't exactly lend itself to hug fests, even when everyone's supposedly on the same side.

Such rivalries end one of two ways: Either the Nephandus gets smart, achieves power, keeps a profile low enough to ensure survival, and steadily collects her own army of allies, cults, pawns, slaves, servitors and so forth...or she dies.

#### Resolution

Nephandi don't have a retirement plan. Once she steps out on the Fallen Path, a Nephandus enters a binary state: power or perish.

#### **Power**

The Nephandic Path, on many levels, involves hunting: seeking victims, devouring lives, shattering taboos, defeating enemies, uncovering secrets that bestow even greater powers, corrupting fellow mages, defiling lesser humans, collecting Otherworldly servitors, attaining grander Arts and resources, exploring the Qlippoth and thereby distilling herself into something even greater than before, really, all of that is a hunt. Life, to the Fallen, is one big hunting trip—one which, if you're smart enough to survive it, can last for centuries.

No matter who she once was, what life she lived before then, what image people behold when they encounter her, or which beliefs she chooses to pursue in the course of following her Path, every Nephandus is a big-game hunter. The game in question involves human sacrifices and ruined lives, dashed hopes and shared miseries, favors repaid and grudges settled, techniques honed and Arts pursued, horrors unleashed and the grand pall of human hopelessness increased to the point of possible extinction. In ideal, the Fallen game is all about proving your worth in a vicious cosmos by destroying everything you touch, with a final triumph measured by personal godhood, global extinction, or both.

In reality, the endgame is revenge on an epic scale. Because underneath the arcane posturing and wicked seductions is a ravaged soul kicking back at life.

#### Perish

A war with the world tends to end with one conclusion: You lose.

There are reasons the Nephandi, for all their cunning and undeniable influence, have not yet destroyed our world or opened the gates to let Those Who Dwell Behind the Stars come in: They die.

Oh, some of them transcend the material realm. Referred to occasionally as the *Ashraaah*, these renunciates enjoy Otherworldly exiles where their word is law and Paradox won't come around and crash the party (not for *them*, at least). Plenty of them, like Jodi Blake, maintain a sort of immortality, sliding around the darkest corners of the Tapestry in pursuit of more pleasures and bigger prey. But most of them die like everybody else. Except their deaths are worse.

The trouble with assholes, even ones with godlike powers, is that people hate their guts. For a mage, "people" has a flexible definition that includes vampires, werewolves, witch-hunters, sorcerers, ghosts, the Fae, secret immortals, mythic beasts, actual demons, divine spirits, sentient forests, living cities, mechanical life-forms, and several worlds full of rival mages who can, will, and do kill any Fallen One they find. Despite frightening powers and pervasive influence, the Eaters of the Weak are outnumbered to a critical degree. Though their youngest generation has achieved global influence and intensified corruption, factors which might just win the Ascension Conflict forever, Fallen mages, particularly the ones who look the way people expect them to appear, tend to perish in Paradox tempests, firefights, celestial interventions, betrayals, mistakes, and the considerable firepower of their Awakened kin.

And when Fallen mages die, their fates are indescribable. As we said, they make a *lot* of enemies. And very bad deals. Damnation seems like an abstract thing to most people; a joke, a song, maybe something to look forward to, if only because it means all your friends will be there to greet you when you finally arrive.

To the Fallen who die, however — as many of them do — damnation is the scream that lasts forever, without an option to escape.

#### **Damnation**

It's no fun to burn in hell's fire. Which hell? Good guestion – there is no single Inferno in the World of Darkness, but hundreds, perhaps thousands, of them. Anything human minds can latch onto and pump full of psychic energy has some level of reality in the Astral Umbra, and that's not even getting into the Underworld, the Qlippoth, the Malfean Realms known to corrupted werewolves, or the grotesque torment-centers crafted by gods, spirit-entities, Marauders, and the Fallen themselves. There's a virtually unlimited source of Otherworldly torments out there, and chances are high that a Nephandus will end her career in at least one of them. And although souls have been known to escape hells or bargain their way out of them, and many hells are only as "eternal" as the soul trapped within them imagines they will be, the fate of winding up in a hell realm for any length of time is enough to make most mages rethink their choice in careers.

But not the Fallen. They're in it to win it, as the saying goes, and while the vast majority of them wind up losing that gamble, it's not for lack of trying.

Knowing all too well about this potential fate, Nephandi are, by and large, cautious people. Recklessness will get you killed, and death is not an experience these mages seek. Thus, the obvious ones running around with black robes and sacrificial daggers are cannon-fodder. The true Nephandi stand as far away from those idiots as possible, and then let them take the fall into damnation whenever possible.

That said, the Fallen usually wind up in hells sooner or later. If only for entertainment's sake, they tend to visit such Realms temporarily if they don't run those Realms outright. As a method for dealing with the inevitable agonies of Fallen existence, Nephandi condition themselves to enjoy agony. That way, even if the devilish Patron or scourging angel gets their flaming talons on the mage's damned soul, the Nephandus has (he hopes) learned to find pleasure in excruciation. That way, when the worst *does* happen, he'll be laughing in between the shrieks and possibly picking up new tricks along the way.

#### Otherworldly Exile

Possibly to escape potential damnation, powerful Nephandi often escape to self-made Realms in or beyond the Horizon. Although the specifics depend upon the metaplot options favored by each Mage group's Storyteller, these Ashraaah have probably established a fairly comfortable exile in such places... comfortable, at least, by Nephandic standards. Guarded by alien creatures and secluded in the vast reaches of Otherworldly space, these unearthly estates suit the needs and desires of their Fallen occupants, and although passage to and from such places is, under most circumstances, difficult if not near-impossible to anyone who lacks the proper keys and portals, these dark sanctuaries provide safety and contemplation for the Nephandi who create them, though rarely for the creatures unfortunate enough to be brought to such places against their will.

Among the Qlippothic Dominions, Nephandi tend to set up "rest stops" and playgrounds in the shells most suited to their tastes. The realms of Lilith, Gamaliel, and A'arab Zaraq are especially popular among Fallen "tourists," with the Qlippothic Labyrinth of Club Malestrom being an especially popular retreat for Eaters of the Weak who lack the resources and mystic power to create Otherworldly Realms of their own.

#### Gilğul

Worse than damnation itself, Gilgul is the traditional sentence for the Fallen and those who conspire with them. As detailed in the Justice and Influence chapter of **The Book of Secrets** (pp. 218-220), this soul-annihilation rite is standard operating procedure where the Traditions are concerned. The Technocracy employs similarly permanent procedures (albeit in a hypertech form), and the Crafts probably have something like it, too. The Fallen themselves aren't above blasting each other's souls to ribbons if such punishments suit them, and so although the ritual involved demands high-octane magick, the chances of a careless Nephandus getting her Avatar shredded (probably while her body is likewise destroyed) are fairly high when a Fallen One plays outside her league.

#### Redemption?

Can a Nephandus redeem herself? That's a common question with no known response. Many mages, Fallen and otherwise, would like to think so. People who believe in a merciful god hold up the hope that even the worst of sinners

can find redemption before they die. If that's true, then the Fallen push the definition of "worst of sinners" to an appalling extreme.

But *can* they be saved? And would one *want* to be? It's a mystery, really.

Because the Abyssal plunge and Qlippothic essence transform each Nephandic soul through sublime alchemy, redemption isn't simply a moral matter. A repentant Nephandus might turn over as many new leaves as he likes but that's not going to change the nature of his transformed soul. The Fallen know this, too, and so although Nephandic mages often *pretend* to be repentant in order to seduce and trick potential saviors, good deeds alone can never win forgiveness for a Fallen One.

Can magick undo the Caul's influence? No. Not even Archmages or the legendary Oracles have been able to successfully perform that feat.

Can a *god* do it? Perhaps. The question really is: Would a *god want* to... and if so, why and what would that divinity demand in return?

Under conventional wisdom, the Fallen are irredeemable. Many people have tried to restore a Nephandus to the Path of salvation but few, if any, have succeeded.

Although Chapter Seven discusses potential exceptions (see p. XX), the Fallen Path is, by all accounts, a one-way trip.

# Original Sin: Nephandic Awakening



Awakening, for the Fallen, hurts.

They have that much, at least, in common with other mages. For despite the popular impression of metaphysical awareness as a joyful occasion (which, in fairness, it *can* be for certain people), spiritual Awakenings are often frightening, traumatic affairs in which everything that seemed until that point to be right abruptly turns out to be *wrong*. Avatar-spirits may assume terrifying

forms with which to hound their mortal counterpart toward a precipice, occasionally a literal one. Even a kindly Avatar unmoors a person's sense of reality, and so if that spirit is even more fearsome than usual, the Awakening can blast a person straight into a surreal nightmare.

For the Fallen, Awakenings often come through violence and violation: Bad trip, battery, assault, torture, rape, betrayal on a soul-deep level, the awful death of someone intimate, near-fatal disease, near-death experience, excruciating pain... always, it seems, the Nephandic Awakening involves a test-to-destruction ordeal. It's as if Fate, gods, or the Avatar have decided to challenge the impending Nephandus to see whether this "Eater of the Weak" is too weak to qualify.

Most Nephandi Awaken as mages before they encounter a Caul. For a time, they exist within a different role, possibly as part of the Traditions, Technocracy, Disparates, or other un-aligned groups. One might have grown up within an occult sect, while another pursued technology before and after his Awakening. Some Fallen mages Awaken on the street or in other desperate circumstances, during natural disasters, wars, and so forth, and although they might take shelter in another Awakened faction first, or try to deny the upheaval in their lives, the darkness of their future Path gets established, one way or another, from its outset. Even in cases where the Awakening involves profound insight or ecstasy (like those

of several characters described in Chapter Six), that bliss is undercut with terror, pain, and seeming madness.

#### Barabbi

You're not good enough for them. They're not good enough for you. Their methods are soft, slow, corrupt, hypocritical. Their theories are outmoded. Their goal is selfish or doomed. Those arguments, and many others, lead mages who'd previously held allegiance to another sect or faction, to jump ship and becomes, in Nephandic terms, barabbi: The worst turncoats of the Awakened world.

As detailed in Mage 20 (p. 227), barabbi mages once belonged to other factions. A good many started out as Tradition mages, but no small number (especially if the Fallen Technocracy metaplot option is in force) started out within the Technocracy. In place of Ascension, a barabbus — inspired by a laundry list of reasons — chooses to pursue Descent. Sometimes, that person leaves her old associations; more often, she remains inside that original sect and poisons it from within.

But why?

More often than not, the original group didn't meet her needs. Perhaps she feels betrayed, abused, pushed around, shoved aside, denied credit for something she deserved, or blamed for something she didn't do. Maybe an itch under her skin drives her to seek something more than what she gets from her initial group. Frequently, that group just isn't extreme enough for her. That first calling represents something significant, perhaps life-altering, but it's simply not enough. Whatever drew her to her old life has been deepened, twisted and intensified by her Nightside conversion.

#### **Technocrats**

Many Technocrats enter Cauls because the Union just isn't getting the job done; there are still too many monsters,

too many Reality Deviants, too much chaos, and so extreme measures must be taken and if that means the sacrifice of a willing agent or two, then that cost is justified. In this view, the agent makes a judgement call which seems, in her head, to be a perfectly rational, if extreme, measure. "The ends justify the means," as it were, and since most modern Technocrats don't believe in gods or an afterlife, that choice rests on the agent's shoulders alone. "Do it," the argument maintains, "and the world will be better for your choice." Those weak rules and anemic policies have undercut Technocratic strength, and so — for the good of the Union and its benevolent goals — they must be set aside by those who have the will to take ultimate measures.

In certain cases, the extremity comes less from a devotion to the Union's drive to make the world safe for humankind, and more from a desire to explore technologies and sciences which the Technocracy refuses to allow. Why can't the Syndicate member devote more resources to creating a fiscally desperate population that depends upon their "job creators"? Why aren't Iterators permitted to research the spiritual side of material hypertech? Why shouldn't Black Suits employ the most extreme psychological techniques without filling out a ton of paperwork? Of course, Progenitors ought to be allowed to explore any and all applications of biotech, no matter how extreme. And yes, dammit, those outer reaches of forbidden space are meant to be explored and populated, why else would the Convention be called the Void Engineers? In such arguments, Nephandi make the case that protocols hamper the Union's efficiency. What which can be done, must be done, with no restrictions permitted and no excuses accepted. (A covertly popular textbook, The Annotated Protocols of Damian, nurtures this push toward extremity; for details, see that entry on p. XX.)

According to some sources, the Technocracy has been corrupted either since its inception or very shortly afterward. The history of that group certainly makes more sense if it has been. Maybe the infection seeped in during the Victorian era, or in the period of the two World Wars. Perhaps it's just limited to certain agents undercutting the Union's will. Truth is, of course, a fuzzy concept in Mage, but whatever the truth might be regarding the Union as a whole, Technocratic barabbi turn that ruthless faction toward devasting ends.

#### Tradition Mages

Power is not meant to be constrained. It must be enjoyed and displayed if it's truly "power" at all. For mages who Fall within the loose ranks of the Council of Traditions, the weak-willed wizards and hack-happy technomancers are fighting a losing war that they don't have to lose if they'd just seize the power they already have and then turn it, without apologies, toward the magnificence they could achieve if they have the courage to do it. Perhaps the desperation of the Ascension War has driven the Nephandic turncoat to this point; maybe it's the frustration of having so much potential power locked

away behind walls of Paradox and secrecy. The compelling argument in favor of defection may involve the deeper levels a person can achieve when she turns her back on fear and principles, or it could be that a new Mythic Age is worth any price, or that the Sleepers are not worth the effort of hiding the truth of magick from them. Maybe they deserve to be dominated by mage-kings; maybe they'll finally see what's possible when the curtain opens on the ultimate expanse of power. A Tradition mage could turn barabbus over love or hate, power or the lack of it, frustration with her limitations, desire for richer knowledge... whatever her reasons might be, they seem like all the right ones when she stands poised at the edge of a Caul, and they drive her Fallen life just as powerfully after her return.

At first glance, the most likely candidates for defection appear to be Ecstatics, Verbenae, Thanatoics, and Hermetic wizards. Why? Well, those Time-hippies are always leaping beyond taboos and enjoying new experiences. The witch-folks are... well, damn, they're witches, right? And witches are evil - everybody knows that! Death-mages? Same deal. And those wizards are always messing around with demons, and so it's inevitable that they'll want to become demons, too. Those are the stereotypes, anyway; occasionally, they're even true. Ecstatic mages do have a propensity to go too far (see the various heresies and paradigms in Chapter Five), and the intensive primitivism and elemental rage within some Verbenae do find an outlet in the bloodiest old ways. Johr does pull certain death-mages to the Abyss, and Hermetic practices do involve playing around with things most mortals shouldn't, so the drive toward arcane excellence racks up certain casualties among the rigid Hermetic ranks.

#### What about the others?

Etherites wrestle with Promethean tendencies, egotism, and ruthless curiosity, all of which can lead to a Fall. Their cousins among the Mercurial Elite and Virtual Adept subcultures seem wildly predisposed toward Falling, if only because of their drive toward ultimate personal freedom, self and social transformation, a voracious taste for new technologies, and the entitled attitude so many of these Elite Adepts display. Akashayana sometimes crack under the strain of the Way, especially if they fall short of its demanding expectations; there's a Void waiting at the edges of Akashic meditations, and some of those disciples cannot escape it. Plus, can you imagine how awful the world would seem to you if you could read other people's thoughts and secrets? It's not hard to see why a mage who could do such things would feel like humanity is too far gone to save. For Choristers, the Absolute sings a song as well, and the shadow of God's Creation is still part of God's Creation, right? It makes sense, then, to be open to all aspects of it, and to punish people who aren't worthy of God's love. And for the Dreamspeakers, the endless humiliations, compromises and atrocities their people continue to suffer cry out for revenge, and what revenge could be more suitable than destroying the people responsible for that oppression by using their favorite indulgences and tools against them? Perhaps by returning to an older, better way — the way of hunter-beasts and those who hunt them — the settler's stain could finally be erased for good.

They're all compelling arguments, and so it's not surprising that so many *barabbi* begin their lives among the Nine Traditions.

#### Disparates and Others

Ambition. Desperation. Pride. Revenge. Such are the core reasons that Disparates and other non-aligned mages gravitate toward the Cauls. For while the Technocratic Union imposes strict discipline with harsh consequences, and the Traditions have deep foundations and good intentions, sects and factions with less external stability enjoy greater freedom, mixed with a larger potential for the Fall.

The optional Reckoning metaplots (described in Mage 20, p. 135) give an extra boost to the idea of Fallen Disparates. Particularly if the Technocracy really *did* purge the Crafts in a genocidal campaign during the late 1990s, and the Traditions *did* reject the Hollow Ones (and then hunt them for betrayal) or else absorb the proud yet desperate survivors of various Crafts into their own ranks, the Disparates have every reason to use every weapon — even Fallen ones — for survival and revenge.

That said, the Disparate Alliance was, at least in theory, founded to *fight* Nephandi, not to join them (see **Mage 20**, pp. 197-201). Thus, while *all* factions punish Fallen mages harshly, the Disparate Alliance (if it exists at all within your chronicle) might exact the most severe penalties for Nephandic allegiance; for details, see **The Book of Secrets** (pp. 233-237).

Certain Disparate groups seem more predisposed to Fall, while others seem far less. The Ahl-i-Batin hold an ancient grudge with the Eaters of the Weak...as well as the most established history of being tricked and seduced by mages who are even subtler than they believe themselves to be. The Bata'a were forged by centuries of genocide, slavery, and oppression of all kinds; their Arts and kindred spirits seem, if only by neccessity, frightening to outsiders, and its voodoo culture holds a longstanding impression as a (literally) Black Art, especially when employed by people with malign intent. (See the Palo Mayombe heresy in Chapter Five, p. XX.) The Children of Knowledge are stubborn individualists whose loose society originated in a sect whose entire history is a convoluted mess; beyond that, as alchemists, these Crowned Ones pursue the ultimate alchemy of the soul, and the Qlippoth has been called perhaps the ultimate vessel of immortal alchemy. Darkling Hollow Ones seem sinister by definition; their interest in the Nightside is essential to their identity, and their history with the Traditions is complex (see "Hollow Treachery?" in Mage 20, p. 201). As for the Kopa Loei, they're proud survivors of enduring genocides and so, despite a deep heritage of purity, they have a compelling reason to sieze any Path available if it means an end to their people's suffering. The same could be said of the Ngoma, although their home cultures have an especially harsh tradition, even today, of dealing with people who pursue malignant magicks. Fallen Hippolytoi may embody the proverbial "woman scorned," while Fallen Taftâni remain stubbornly proud of their right to use *every* sort of Art, even if that means dealing with Iblis, Angra Mainyu, or the Ifrit. The Templar Knights endure a long tradition of assumed corruption, both from their association with Baphomet (see p. XX) and their bloody dedication to war in the name of their Lord. And although the Wu Lung remain dedicated to the sublime Order of Heaven, some crack under strain like their Hermetic and Akashic cousins, or pursue a secret devotion to Sunwukung, the chaotic Monkey King, in his most defiant and destructive aspects. This, each Craft in the Alliance has strong reasons against Falling as well as strong reasons certain members might Fall anyway.

#### The Caul-Born

Orphans, having little or nothing to hold onto beyond their own principles and perhaps a small group, have the greatest tendency to Fall. Sometimes known as the *Caul-Born*, these people either Awaken through the Cauls themselves, or else Fall into the Cauls shortly after Awakening. It's a longheld view that the Traditions and Technocracy race to claim "orphans" (and assign the insulting capital "O" to mages who don't belong to their factions) so as to keep them out of the hands of the rival faction and subsequently put them on the ideal Path. More likely, it's to prevent those unaligned mages from joining the Fallen, either by mistake or by design.

"Caul-Born" isn't a phrase you'll hear often, if at all, from Council mages or Technocrats. Among the Fallen, however, folks who Awaken on the Nephandic Path from the beginning (or as close to that beginning as is possible) are considered "pure" in their devotions...or at least as pure as the Fallen get, anyway. Unlike barabbi, they've got no previous loyalty to discard and habits to unlearn; unlike widderslainte, they don't grow up conflicted about who and what they are. Caul-Born Nephandi are who they are because they want to be that way. Although all Nephandi make a choice to enter the Cauls, the Caul-Born chose the Fallen Path above all possible other aspirations. Their Arts are Black Arts by design, not modification, and their beliefs are held sincerely, not inspired by another group's indoctrination. Thus, Caul-Born mages maintain bone-deep loyalty to their Fallen cause. With very few exceptions, they hold very few regrets.

#### Widderslainte

Doomed. Or at least they seem to be. As detailed in **Mage** 20 (p. 227), *widderslainte* come out of the womb already disposed to Fall. Their title comes from a twisted perversion of "proper health" in Gaelic, and they are perhaps — in theory, anyway — the most sympathetic of their kind.

In **Mage**, reincarnation is a given. Although many souls prefer to remain (or get trapped) in an Otherworldly heaven



or hell, most souls eventually wind up back on the Great Wheel of birth, death, and rebirth. As posited in the essay "The Math of Mortal Metaphysics" (The Book of Secrets, pp. 294-295), a person's consciousness might be separate from the immortal soul; while the ephemeral essence gets composed in the Great Wheel, that person's consciousness remains wherever he thinks he belongs after death. In that case, the Nephandic Avatars which reincarnate as widderslainte might be the ghost-like consciousnesses of Nephandi who escape from hells and return to the mortal world as newborn human beings. Then again, they could be alien consciousnesses, demonic urge-spirits, broken Avatar shards, or other scraps of metaphysical debris. Whatever their origins might be, these troublesome souls spend lots of energy trying to drive their new incarnation back into the Nephandic fold.

As mentioned throughout this book (most clearly in Chapter Seven), children cannot abuse adults in the current sense of the term "abuser." Children lack the development and perspective to make adult choices with regards to adults and matters of sex, violence, and so forth. Children can be cruel, violent, even deadly, and are manipulative by nature, if only because it's the only way they know how to get what they want and need. Still, there's a vast difference between the "morality" of a growing child and the maturity expected of a grown adult (something that's true of certain developmentally hindered adults as well), and so although a widderslainte spirit inhabits a child, and can drive that child toward terrible things, that child isn't as responsible for her actions as an adult mage would be. In that sense, then, a widderslainte child is not a Nephandus, just someone who's likely to wind up as one.

Which means that un-Cauled young widderslainte, unlike adult Nephandi, can be saved before a Fall.

It's not easy; it's perilous, and the Fallen Avatar will do everything in its power to either break the influence of better people or else destroy the child and give the spirit another chance to try again. But it is possible, before the Caul's Descent, to prevent supposed "destiny" from bringing a new Nephandus into the world.

A widderslainte's road is inexpressibly savage. Battered internally by both the Nephandic Avatar and her own better nature, and most likely externally as well by parents and other authorities who respond poorly (if often understandably) to the demonic urges within that growing kid, a widderslainte lives under the shadow of a dismal fate which leads, quite often, to a Caul and permanent Descent for at least that incarnation.

In an attempt to serve that "destiny," outside parties might draw a *widderslainte* child to a Caul, and then try to either shove her into it or coax her into entering it herself. In both cases, the child gets ripped apart by the tides of Qlippothic alchemy... possibly because the child resists the violation, possibly because a young body and mind simply are not yet ready for the full infusion of Qlippothic essence. In both cases, a child — at least not one who hasn't yet reached

adolescence — is not physically, mentally, or metaphysically developed enough to survive the journey through a Caul. Regardless of the archetypal "demon-child," a child cannot become a full Nephandus yet.

If she somehow resists the Caul's gravity and the temptations of the Fall, the *widderslainte* faces a lifetime of abuse. The Avatar demands satisfaction; Fallen agents try the "It is your destiny!" approach, while competing parties (mages and

otherwise) punish the *widderslainte* for her behavior, seek her conversion to their side, or try to wipe her out early and save everyone the trouble of one more Nephandus in this world. That *widderslainte* is, through no fault of her own, damned if she does and damned if she doesn't. She *could* resist Nephandic influence and survive this incarnation without opting for Descent, but most poor souls don't bother trying. That said, that *widderslainte can* try to resist it... and could possibly even succeed.

# Nephandic Avatars: Souls of the Abyss



The Fallen are, by nature, predatory. This is as true for Avatars that once seemed benevolent until the final Fall rendered them into travesties of their original forms, as it is for the Avatars that came predisposed toward Nephandic tendencies. Thus, their guiding-spirit Avatars assume predatory forms as well. Demonic entities are probably most common (it's not the sort of thing Nephandi talk about, after all, so it's not like people outside the faction would know such information to begin

with), but tales speak of Fallen mages whose Avatars assume the form of family members, lovers, rivals, wild beasts, mythic creatures, uncanny presences, and — quite often — people from the mage's past whose abuse shaped the budding Nephandus and steered her toward that Path.

Regardless of the form it takes, a Nephandic Avatar has been through the Cauls. Thus, it's essentially malignant even if the shape it assumes appears initially innocent. The "guidance" it provides could include sly suggestions, vicious teardowns of that mage's self-esteem, brutal violence, sexual seductions or violations... whatever it takes to get a rise out of the mage in question is fair game as far as a Nephandic Avatar is concerned. Such entities have no shame, mercy, limits, or qualms. As the magus is a predator of mortal folk, the Caul-bent Avatar is a predator of that mage's soul.

Widderslainte people born with Nephandic Avatars suffer the worst torments of all, for while a Nephandus who has willingly accepted his Descent still gets flayed psychically by his internal guide, a person whose soul is bent toward a malevolent destiny, but who does not himself want to become evil, has an extremely hard road ahead of him. That Avatar, to him, becomes an abuser he cannot escape — hectoring, shaming, slamming him with nightmares and wheedling him with temptations whose ultimate expression leads straight to the Cauls. Resisting this soul-bound cacodaemon is more than an exercise of will; it's a lifelong dedication to being better than the near-literal devil on your shoulder (or in this case, in your soul) wants you to be.

#### Daath and the Abyssal Essence

According to the lore of the Caul, each Fallen One's soul has been tainted or inverted, possibly in permanent ways, by the forces beyond the Cauls. That's not wrong, exactly, but it's a moralistic shadow of the truth. In a metaphysical sense, that Avatar slips through the flaws of Reality's Tapestry, Falls from the grace of cosmic order, and plummets into the Abyss of Daath, as explored further in Chapter Four (pp. XX-XX). There, the soul subsumes the essence of the Qlippoth, and is suitably transformed in strange and awful ways.

These essential energies — in Mage terms, the Avatar Essence—are most frequently associated with the inborn spirits of widderslainte. Other mages, too, can feel their Avatars shift. In the surges of forbidden understanding, they're infused by the nature of certain Qlippoth even though, in most cases, a transformed mage has never ventured to that realm himself. The draw and push of such energies brings strange new qualities to an Awakened Avatar...and if an unfortunate person is born with a Nephandic Avatar, those qualities are within him from the very beginning of his life.

#### Chaotic: The Primordial Essence

All things must return to their primordial state, preferably by way of Chaos. This Essence disintegrates illusions of stability from its human host, inspiring mercurial activities and unpredictable actions. Fallen mages of a Chaotic persuasion can whiplash from kindness to cruelty without warning, betray their closest associates, fall deeply in love with someone, sacrifice him to a Goetic manifestation, and weep sincerely while doing so... anything that subverts predictability, even by Nephandic standards, sounds like a good idea to a Chaotic Essence Nephandus. Although most obviously associated with the K'llashaa sect, this capricious energy can be found among any sort of Fallen One.

Mages who Awakened with a Primordial Essence before their Nephandic conversation find themselves drawn, after the Fall, toward intensifying storms of chaos. Once Fallen, such people seem to flutter on the black wings of A'arab Zaraq, the Qlipha of dispersion. It's been said (often unfairly) that the Primordial Essence is closest to the cosmic forces that flow through the Cauls, and so people with that Essence seem potentially suspect even if they never Fall. Those who do, however, embody that ageless Absolute in its most implacable form — not merely malicious but cosmically alien.

#### Destructive: The Dynamic Essence

Where Chaos is disruptive, Destruction is volatile. In Destructive Avatars, the urge to create becomes the urge to destroy in the name of new creations which might result from the ruins. That future potential, though, is a pretext; for while the Dynamic Avatar pursues constant change, the Nephandic twist pushes it toward annihilation.

Dynamic people are volatile by nature to begin with. Once infused with the savage fires of Golchab or the rampant lust of Lilith, however, that volatility hits a frightening degree. It's sexy in a terrifying way, really, and terrifying in sexy ways, as well. Whatever restraints a person might have had before Awakening or (in the case of *barabbi*) Falling are burned away in the hot blast of a Destructive Essence.

#### Frozen: The Static Essence

Cold: That's the word for mages with this Essence. While the Pattern Essence cultivates patience and stability, its Qlippothic manifestation assumes the alien stillness and emotionless gleam of the Black Diamond itself. Influenced by the spider-web corridors of Satariel or the arid expanse

of Samael, an Avatar with this disposition retains the chilly flatness of an obsidian monolith.

Frozen Avatars plot, plan, and execute with unnerving precision. Their stratagems are as ruthless as the tortures they inflict. There's no pity to be found in the eyes or heart of such a person. Though Nephandi are predatory by definition, those with a Frozen Essence are the most implacable of their kind.

#### Tormented: The Questing Essence

Unsettled. Unmoored. Maybe even guilty. The Essence of which, un-Fallen, drives its human self from place to place and passion to passion finds itself, under Qlippothic influence, Tormented. Pounded by the hammer blows of Gha'agsheblah, perhaps bathed in Thagirion's Black Sun, this soul cloaks its human host in spiritual nettles. Nowhere will she find rest. Never can she know peace. All Nephandi feel a certain prick of restlessness. To a Tormented Avatar, that restlessness remains eternal.

It's been said that those Fallen with a Tormented Essence are the dreamers of their kind — mages with big plans and depthless curiosity. It's tempting to feel admiration, pity, even hope for them, as if perhaps the long Path they're drifting along could wind up someplace better than a hell or ultimate extinction. Those hopes, though, are probably unfounded. If anything, such Torment may drive these Fallen mages harder to achieve ultimate godhood, at which point whatever good qualities they possess would pale in comparison to the horrors they might craft for the inhabitants of their new universes.

# The Law of Predation: Seduce, Abuse, Corrupt, Destroy



As Lex Predaetorious proclaims, each Nephandus is an Eater of the Weak. If the Fallen ran around blasting hellfire in people's face, though, they'd be the hunted instead of the hunters. A smart hunter uses stealth, traps, trickery, surprise, long-range weapons, and — when need be — overwhelming speed and force. He gets his prey to come to him, turns her senses and frailties against her, lulls her into a sense of security, and then runs her to

ground, exhausts her, and finally brings her down.

If this also sounds like a domestic-abuse scenario, that's because it is.

Behind all their grand mythologies, metaphysical aspirations, and undeniably tragic histories, Nephandi are abusive predators. Rarely do they go for the quick, clean kill of a cheetah with an antelope... and, really, even *that* kill seems

quick and clean only if you're not the antelope in question. Partly from necessity, partly as a mark of pride, and largely because it's *fun*, a Nephandus takes his sweet time baiting the hook, dragging it under his prey's nose, sliding it in, and pulling his quarry to the feast. The fact that it rarely looks like a hook at all is what makes the hunter so effective and the victory (for him) so damned enjoyable.

As covered in Mage 20 (pp. 230-232), the primary Nephandic strategies include:

- Indulgence: What you want, they've got. The Fallen One sets the lure by offering her prey something he needs or craves, then makes certain he knows exactly where he got it from... and that there's more for him whenever he wants more.
- Deception: Lies and Nephandi. The two go together, and regardless of all protestations of honesty (see



Chapter One), a Fallen One tells his prey whatever it is he thinks she wants or needs to hear, especially if that includes repentance and apologies for bad behavior.

- Isolation: The hunter cuts off potential escape routes by limiting their prey's options. Naturally, this sort of thing demands subtlety and trust. Given the volatile nature of social media and the growing disconnect between face-to-face contact and virtual relationships, however, it's easier than ever to isolate a target from protective company and then hedge him into the box where the Fallen One is the only one he trusts.
- Escalation: Once the hunter has her prey where she wants them, she steps up the pace and intensity of whatever tactics she employs. Affection becomes love-bombing. Force becomes brutality. Pleasure assumes an addictive quest for ever more. The growing scale of those experiences, ideally, bludgeons the target into submission and leads them toward...
- Corruption: Now she subverts them to her cause.
   Those stupid laws are for lesser people, not for you!
   Those damned Reality Deviants won't go away until we plant every one of them in the ground. Demons are just psychological constructs, you know they can't

- really hurt you if your will is strong enough. Trying a different tactic, she could also undercut the prey's confidence, setting herself up as the ultimate authority of what's good for them. ("Come on, put those stupid toys away you know you just depend too often on that sort of crutch.") Either way, the trap closes, the victim offers their throat to the wolf, and the feast begins, perhaps with a trip to the nearest Caul.
- Force: Some prey can be won only through violence. If the prey tries to run, fight back, or bring in aid, then the hunter might just have to retaliate. Naturally, it's all his fault, too why does he make her do such things? Though it's rarely a go-to tactic, if only because most people instinctively resist it, force becomes the method of dominant control, especially when it's combined with a cycle of apology, affection, deception, and pervasive isolation. Force isn't always obviously violent, either; threats, gaslighting, redirection, and emotional "alpha-ing" domination are all examples of force that don't include fireballs or fists.

Only a rank amateur uses a single approach and, in the Fallen world, "amateur" is a nice way of saying *casualty*. The wise Nephandus employs several flavors of each technique, alternating between them for maximum effect.

Seduce, abuse, corrupt, destroy: That's the essence of the Nephandic hunt. Whether victory looks like a shiny new pawn for their collection of dregs, a generous if deluded benefactor, a cowering slave wrapped in figurative or literal chains, a source of support, or simply another warm body on the sacrificial slab, the hunter-prey dynamic forms the core of every Fallen relationship. Oh, the hunter might be fond of their prey. They may even sincerely believe they love him. The actions they display, however, are not love. They're predatory, plain and simple, and their "love" is the feeling a glutton holds toward his lunch.

# Abusive Tools and Techniques

Nephandi rarely seem "mad, bad and dangerous to know" unless they think that sort of thing appeals to you. Instead, they dress their identity in the most seductive colors possible, come on like the gods' gift to you, and then employ an array of techniques to get you where they want you and keep you there until they're done with you. Although a number of those techniques *are*, in fact, magickal (Chapter Five is full of them), those spells and Wonders typically depend upon the seductive enchantments of social-control techniques.

In Mage, magick is all about control. The mage has enough belief, skill, will and vision to reshape reality to his desires while getting other people to go along for the ride, usually by tricking them into seeing magick as something they'll willing to accept. To some degree, mages can all too easily abuse "the Sleeping Masses." The Traditions, Technocracy, and Disparates have rules against that sort of thing for good reason, and Paradox enforces harsh metaphysical consequences upon it, too. The Fallen, on the other hand, pride themselves on being able to do it, get away with it, and remake — perhaps destroy — their world by controlling the reality of everyone they touch.

Some of the more pervasive, and often most effective, techniques of abusive control include:

#### Alpha-ing

The alpha-male wolf myth provides plenty of inspiration and excuses for the social-dominance technique known as *alpha-ing*: Acting like the biggest, most dominant thing in the room so everybody knows you're in charge. This tactic is not male-exclusive, of course — *any* gender can alpha people. The point is dominance through situational control. An alpha commands the room, often without a single obvious threat and generally through body language, attitude, and a few well-placed displays of strength.

Epitomized by the Mage 20 paradigm Might is Right, the alpha attitude demands submission — through force of personality if possible, through force if need be. Looming and cocky body language, strong handshakes and other sorts of literal and figurative muscle flexing, displacing contenders for attention by occupying social and physical space, "putting

people in their place" through verbal jabs and insults, steady and often aggressive eye contact, or maneuvering people around physically through assertive touch and body language, the "alpha" commands obedience by daring other people to disagree with them and displaying the ability to take them down if they do. It suggests power by displaying the ability to use power. If and when someone "steps out of line," the would-be alpha teaches the proverbial lesson he won't forget.

Alpha behavior suggests confidence even when the person acting that way actually *lacks* confidence. It's attractive because it radiates the ability to deal with things (and people), and thus feels comforting and strong. Social animals *do* look for leaders to provide guidance and defense. Real leaders, though, actually provide what the pack needs. Pretentious "alphas" take far more than they give.

Nephandi tend to alpha people — including one another — by appearing to be strong and often benevolent unless crossed. If someone *does* contradict them, there's an immediate response — subtle, if possible, but innately dominant. Magickal influence often reinforces that impression (especially by using the Mind and Forces Spheres to project mental and sometimes physical dominance), but social savvy focuses such spells for maximum effect.

Fallen alpha-ing techniques involve displays of generosity, assertions of superiority, forceful presence, deal-making from a dominant position, immediate takedowns of potential rivals, and the sort of social and magickal gamesmanship that make Nephandic groups such treacherous circles to occupy.

**Counter:** Quiet confidence and capability undermine exuberant alpha displays; a person who's good at what he does

#### The Alpha Myth

Although the idea of dominant leaders in animal packs (and human ones, too) is older than the alpha myth, the concept of "alpha wolves" competing to drive out all other contenders for the leadership position and then bullying all the other wolves into submission came from the book *The Wolf: Ecology and Behavior of an Endangered Species*. Written by L. David Mech and originally published in 1970, the book claims "alpha wolves" dominate their packs through force of personality and occasional violence.

The book's author was wrong, and he's spent decades trying to dispel his own mythology.

Mech based his assertions on observations of captive wolves. Made up of strangers who'd been captured and thrown together under man-made conditions, those wolves fought for dominance in ways they would never have done in the wild. Combined with folklore about "big bad wolves," Mech's image caught fire in the popular imagination. When Mech tried to take his rather successful book out of print, his publishers refused. The book remains a popular text on the subject even though its own author disowned it

is generally more valuable to the group than someone who flexes her muscles and takes advantage of authority. All the same, this tactic — like the other ones in this section — can be incredibly hard to counter, especially in social environments like offices, schools, military organizations, criminal underworlds, and other places where the loud alpha seems like a better leader than the quiet, capable leader who does the real heavy lifting.

#### Gaslighting

Abuse, like magick, is all about control. And just as mages remake Reality in ways that counteract the Consensus, abusive people rearrange apparent reality in order to make people doubt their own sense of it. Named for the play and movie *Gaslight*, gaslighting involves undermining the target's trust and stability by getting her to question her own sanity.

In gaslighting, the attacker changes things around — verbally, physically, perhaps magickally—and then points out that the person he's assaulting is seeing things differently than they appear to be now. Nope, no one was at the door, and *I* didn't hear anyone knocking at it; your tome was right here when I last saw it, so where did you put it *this* time? Gaslighting not only commands the narrative of a situation, it puts the target at fault for not seeing things "as they really are."

Worse still, social gaslighting turns a group against a person by asserting that reality is not what the target says or believes it is. By "controlling the narrative" (that is, establishing a version of reality and telling other people what it is, convincingly enough to get those people to believe it), the abuser sets up his version of "the truth" to run counter to what his victim perceives as real. An abuser who can frame their victim and make her look crazy in the eyes of everybody else can inflict frightening degrees of social and often legal wreckage, especially after their target begins to believe she really is the guilty one at fault.

Awakened magick allows for devastating gaslight assaults, especially by way of spells (featured in Chapter Five) like **Blindside** and **I Disappear**. A mage *can* literally rearrange reality, which puts his target at an extreme disadvantage.

**Counter:** It's easy to doubt your own sanity, especially in the Awakened world. The best tactic for fighting a non-magickal gaslight campaign involves watching for, collecting, and keeping track of, evidence that supports your perceptions, and making sure that other people see it, too.

In terms of magickal defenses, spirit-entities can provide unexpected witnesses and testimony... assuming, of course, that you can trust what they say. Meanwhile, Time- and Correspondence-Sphere spells provide great tools for seeing what did and did not actually happen... although a mage with similar magicks can always change *that* too...

#### Flying Monkeys

A common term for folks who aid and excuse abusers, a "flying monkey" swoops in to support his friends, no matter

what his friends might have done. Targets get attacked, rumors get planted or suppressed, internet threads get derailed, and people who remain uncertain about the nature of accusations are assured that such accusations are false. Most flying monkeys feel they're doing the right thing; if the accusations they're defending against are bullshit, those people are correct. If the person in question really is guilty of those crimes, however, the flying monkeys become a many-headed weapon aimed at the people who've been wronged by the guilty party.

The preeminent weapon of internet culture, flying monkeys are at least as old as human tribes. A tribe, after all, defends its members, even if certain members opened the tribe up for attack. Abusers build up veritable armies of flying monkeys, and then set them loose on their desired targets. Bullies of all types surround themselves with support crews, winning those "friends" over with status, gifts, flattery, generosity, and heaping helpings of other social-manipulation tactics. Warlords keep their enforcers well-fed while giving them plenty of opportunities to kick other people down. Abusers provide flying monkeys with similar goodies, and though the "enforcement" is more likely to be social than physical (unless the abuser has no reason to worry about laws), the monkeys can be just as devastating as any physical assailant. Real-life people have been driven to suicide, criminal persecution, and social and financial ruin by flying monkeys... and if those monkeys happen to have actual powers of life and death (like soldiers, gang members, bad cops, and government officials), the victim really can wind up dead and buried in an unmarked grave.

When mages are involved, a Nephandus might have actual flying monkeys at her command. Demon servitors, malign spirits, artificial lifeforms, constructs and biomodified agents, cult members, vampires and man-beasts, debtors, allies, lower-ranking mages, magical beasts; any Nephandus

#### Followers of the Lie

Dregvati, the "Followers of the Lie," provide support for Nephandic masters and manipulators. Assembled and governed through social acumen, material resources, high status, and metaphysical command, these pawns in the Nephandic chess game typically see themselves (rightly or otherwise) as favored servants who benefit from following the Fallen One's lead. Some view her as a friend, others as a master, and quite a lot of them as a source of power whose favor benefits them, too. Assembling "the dregs" is the first test of a new Nephandus' power, and no one survives long among the Fallen without a substantial pool of such associates.

Potential "flying monkey" character templates and Nephandic allies can be found in Chapter Six. Check out **Mage 20**, Appendix I, as well as the sourcebook **Gods & Monsters**, for an array of other possible associates.

worth that name has plenty of *dregvati* to send against victims and enemies. Certain Nephandi of the Information Age use the internet as a sort of magic circle, conjuring allies "from nowhere" and then setting them after the targets of choice.

**Counter:** Sadly, the best defense against flying monkeys involves having flying monkeys of your own. Although certain pawns might be swayed by new evidence, rewards, or tactics, loyalty is a hallmark of flying-monkey types.

#### Love-Bombing

You are the *Best. Thing. Ever.* You're perfect. You can do no wrong. You hung the sun, moon, and stars, and without you in their life, the person telling you all this would be lost. Everyone likes affirmation, but love-bombing takes it to an extreme. Although it seems romantic to be showered with gifts, praise, and attention, this technique asserts control by making the recipient feel obligated, grateful, overwhelmed, isolated, and eventually trapped.

Beneath the adoring façade, a love-bomber asserts "you are nothing without my love." Especially for targets with low self-esteem or status, abusive histories, cold families, harsh workplaces, and other situations that inspire feelings of loneliness and worthlessness, love-bombing transforms the prey's self-image while digging in hooks of dependence and loyalty. Meanwhile, the love-bomber pushes everyone else in that person's life aside. "They don't love you like I love you. They don't appreciate you. They don't know you like I do." It's not long before the prey starts to believe it all.

Love-bombing usually creates material dependence, too. In the case of mages, there could possibly be metaphysical dependence as well. The **Beautify** spell, for instance, makes a great love-bombing tool, one that's easily revoked if the abuser gets upset. Eventually, the abuser *always* gets upset, of course, then love-bombs the victim in faux-repentance before kicking the cycle back again.

Counter: Excessive displays of affection that feel way out of proportion to the relationship, come at suspicious times, or pour in at tentative stages of the relationship (like after a fight, prior to driving a previous friend away, while plotting out a drastic new course for the relationship, and so on) are red flags for a love-bombing run. There are lines between appreciation and control, and "gifts" that seem to come with strings attached usually do.

#### **Undercutting**

When armies put fortifications under siege, they bring in specialists to undercut the defenses. Abusive people and institutions do the same thing, too. Lies, half-truths, misdirection, and counterattacks provide the obvious methods for undercutting a person's confidence and status; the most effective method, though, involves getting the target to do it himself.

Like spies within the fortification, insecurities weaken the defenses. Everybody's insecure about something, and the most apparently confident people are often more insecure than usual and simply cover for it better. Abusers — with or without magickal abilities — can spot insecurities, fasten onto them, and work them until the target's defenses weaken. Backhanded compliments, "little jokes" aimed at tender places, disparaging "advice" and "guidance," the insult-compliments known as "negging," dismissal of accomplishments, debts, failures, and betrayals by other people are all common undercutting tactics. Really, *anything* that can get a person questioning their own competence and abilities is fair game for undercutting assaults.

Socially, undercutting tactics involve gossip campaigns, revelations about real or imaginary flaws and misdeeds, group purity campaigns, isolation from the group, revocation of status, questioning of competence and authority, flattery of, and gifts to, other people so as to put the undercut party at a social disadvantage, and other acts of not-quite-aggression that wear away at the target's social standing.

The term *passive-aggressive* is a good description of undercutting behavior. Instead of attacking the target openly, the abuser digs away at the internal resources and external support systems. The internet provides an awesome tool for this sort of thing, as the manipulator can exert social undercutting through emails and locked discussions while also winnowing away at the target in private conversations. While obvious attacks put the target and his allies on the defensive, undercutting pretends to be support even as it wears support away.

Magick, of course, allows the Fallen manipulator to exert influence spells while using Entropy to spot exploitable weaknesses. Correspondence and Data help him gather more information than a typical abuser could uncover, and he might use scrying spells to determine his next move, or teleportation rituals to plant false evidence to bolster his attacks. Meanwhile, spells like Blur Truth, Blindside, and Rile the Herd rearrange reality to suit the abuser's needs. Because so much of this tactic involves getting people to doubt themselves and one another, this tactic damages the recipient while protecting the one behind it.

**Counter:** Because it's often difficult to see through attacks targeted at your weak spots, get perspective from other people. Ask for feedback, pay attention to what they say, and if you find yourself making excuses for the person you're asking about, realize that they've probably been undercutting you for ages before you noticed it.

Social undercutting is much harder to defend against, and the best defense (though not an infallible one) usually involves being public and open so people can't use your secrets against you, while giving a potential assailant as little damaging material as possible.

#### Repentance and Apologies

She's so sorry. She didn't mean it. She's so broken and worthless and she doesn't deserve forgiveness but she's really

sorry this time, and it'll never happen again, so if you could just find it in your heart to... we've all heard it. Some of us believed it. But it works anyway, often because we want so badly to trust someone who's come to matter to us. Everybody makes mistakes, and no one's perfect, and so we forgive those who trespass against us, as we hope to be forgiven ourselves when need be. It's *good* to forgive people, after all. It's godly and it's human and it's enlightened and all that.

Yet, manipulative people (Nephandic and otherwise) know how to use that shit against you.

A repentant abuser plays a handful of sympathy cards, backing them up with pleas for understanding and reminders of her own abuse. One of the few times you'll see a Nephandus begging is when one of them thinks she'll win your sympathy that way. Certain mages, of course, are extremely vulnerable

to this sort of ploy: Choristers want to inspire faith and love; Ecstatics recall that everyone fucks up. Healers, regardless of their faction, feel duty-bound to heal wounds, and this tactic turns that duty back against the healer. Eventually, the abuser lashes out again. Besides, you know, it really is your fault. Why do you make her *do* these things to you?

Counter: See the Nephandus for what she is, not for what she claims to be. Everybody makes mistakes, and damaged people make more of them than usual. Even so, actions speak louder than words, and a truly repentant person won't keep doing the same awful things. Establishing strong personal boundaries around what is and is not acceptable and forgivable in your life provides a strong defense against this tactic. A good manipulator, of course, will challenge that defense with every resource she commands, so making boundaries and enforcing boundaries are very different things.

# Culmination: Sympathy for the Devils?



to Fall themselves.

Existence hurts. The Fallen share that pain. It's the nature of who they are and what they do. No matter how charming they might be, or how sympathetic another person feels about the torments a Fallen One endures, Nephandi are active, willing predators whose approach to Enlightenment involves the suffering of others.

Never forget that.

Because when other mages do, they tend

The Path toward the Cauls is paved with pain, abuse, malice, revenge, manipulation, and a sense of one's own

superiority. The cobblestones of that road, however, are set in social acceptance, forgiveness, and the willingness to look the other way when the Fallen are around. Nephandi cultivate that acceptance by pretending to be helpful, invoking sympathy for their hard lives, and being useful enough to other people that those folks will turn a blind eye to the abuses they perpetrate.

The Devil loves sympathy. It's a great way to get you to hand him your soul.

Or the soul of the person next to you. Or best of all, both.

Everybody's got damage. No one's perfect, especially not a mage.

But seeing the Fallen Ones as "not that bad once you get to know them" is a sure pathway toward ultimate Descent.



# Chapter Three: But Darkness Visible

...democracy is not merely doomed, it is doom itself.

— Nick Land, The Dark Enlightenment

It's early in a village about 15 kilometers outside a town most people will never hear of. The morning heat haze has yet to burn off, and the dirt road darkens a deeper shade of red. The young man who'd held the protest sign has finally stopped screaming. Even so, his eyes keep blinking, their tears gleaming in the early morning light.

The mercenaries laugh as they take turns wrapping his guts around a tree. The sign he'd held a few minutes before, "The place for Children is in School," lies in the reddening mud, boot prints stamped across its dull, white face. A bored soldier smokes the last Circinus cigarette in his pack and wipes sweat from his face as his buddy draws ragged lines in the skin of the boy's bare legs with the dull edge of a rusty machete blade, carving what could be a sigil or a meaningless pattern.

Somewhere not far off, his mother wails as other solders break her arms and legs. A few of her teeth hit the road. One sister got away. The other squirms beneath a soldier's weight as God's Hammer strikes again.

"So, Argo," Drake asks, his drunk blue eyes gleaming in the California night. "How many people did you have to kill to afford this house?"

"Hell, I don't know." Argo laughs, blinking the memory away. Behind him, the pool shimmers an illuminated blue. "I lost track a long time ago."

Drake laughs. The girls laugh. Everybody laughs. It's a nice warn night, the wildfire smoke a distant memory now. The air hangs thick with chlorine and expensive booze.

Everyone at the party thinks Argo's joking.

But he's not.

Argo's just getting started. Sacrifice brings reward. With his Hammer in demand, life's full of possibilities. Shares are up. Business is biting. It's a dog-eat-dog world, after all, and the best toys go to the dog with the biggest teeth.

#### Faces in the Smoke

To negate rightness. To eat the weak. To cloud, to obscure, to mislead, to darken. In all forms of their Fallen name, Nephandi exist in an ominous twilight, hidden from clear view and present where you expect to see them least. From the age of the Night Hunters to the shadows of our present era, the Fallen hunt, seduce, corrupt, and destroy.

Among this society of predators, the hunt remains both social and solitary: Social, in that its tactics manipulate the prey and its surroundings; and solitary, in that each hunter must stalk her prey and run it to ground herself. She'll have allies, naturally, and servants, of course. Still, a hunter who cannot prove her value in the hunt won't last long enough to claim a spot at their table of the damned.

The following chapter explores fellowship among the Fallen — or what passes for it, anyway. It won't reveal everything, of course. By necessity, many answers remain hidden, both by the obscure nature of Nephandi themselves, and by the dramatic necessity of not spelling everything out and

thereby ruining the mysteries behind the most ominous faction in Mage's war. Among the shadows, though, we can catch a glimpse or two of these Eaters of the Weak and see where and how they plot extinction or self-godhood at humanity's expense.

## The Unholy Trinity



That old three-headed dragon — the Infernalists, the K'llashaa, and the Malfeans — are all most people ever see when they go looking for the Fallen Ones. Text and tradition have rendered these arcane sects into a tripartite face of demonic madness, and as far as most mages understand, that face represents Nephandi as a whole.

The impression is dead wrong, but that's the most familiar face.

For millennia, these groups reflected the malign Enlightenment of the Fallen Path. And though their influence is not what it once was, these sects retain a place of (dis)honor among the troops of the Ascension War.

#### Infernalists: Their Satanic Majesties

It's traditional, you know: The bloody altar, the black candles, the Second Pentacle of Saturn etched upon the floor while a Goetic demon bellows and young virgins bleed their lives away at your feet. It seems silly in this day and age, but the Old Ways sometimes really *do* work best. For Infernalist Nephandi, the future rests upon the past. And no sect, in that past, earned greater dread than those who dealt with demons in the night.

More of a collection of sects than a unified sect in itself, Infernalist Nephandi wrangle the blackest of old Black Arts. They are, to those who know about the Fallen at all, the public face, so to speak, of the Eaters of the Weak. And yet, in the modern era, that face is composed largely of unAwakened dregs and a handful of mages who crave the way things used to be.

Conventional lore portrays the Infernalists as soul-bound servitors to hell-spawned powers. In return for demonic pacts (see Chapter Five), these desperate mortals subvert their rivals, gather slaves, and throw endless victims into various infernos in order to please the Lords of the Pit. Eventually, it's said, those Lords will rise and reclaim the Earth taken from them by the angels of God. Until that time, their Fallen servants will keep the fires burning in hopes of their speedy, but not too speedy, return.

It's rather quaint, really. You can see the power of the idea back in the Middle Ages, but now, in the harsh glare of nuclear weapons, cell phones, and the internet, it looks more like a music video than something an Awakened mage should fear. Which is why the Infernalist Nephandi have been

steadily declining in numbers and influence since the turn of the 20th century. Although their theatrical deviltry won a warm spot in the hearts of Decadent and Romantic artists during the occult revival of the 1800s, it paled in comparison to the mechanized carnage of the First World War and the many upheavals that followed in its wake. The shadow side of the counterculture era led to an Infernalist revival in the 1960s and 70s, but their star has faded (perhaps literally) in the decades since then.

And yet...

Of all the Fallen, Infernalists best understand the ancient rituals of Goetia and the Arts of Demonology (detailed in Chapter Five). The Qlippoth is an essential element of their training, and their Litanies are the most arcane yet comprehensive collections of lightless esoterica. Like the Hermetic Order with which they share so many Arts, secrets, protocols and members, Infernalist Nephandi lean heavily upon traditions that still support their weight because those structures were built to last. If nothing else, Infernal Nephandi are methodical, organized, and often surprisingly patient. No other sect places so much importance on Nephandic titles (see this book's Lexicon) and their associated status protocols. Where Malfeans sneer at hierarchy and K'llashaa stare into hungry skies, Infernalists recite the rituals properly, knowing that a missed or mangled word means death.

# Laham: The Demon-Born

Said to be the offspring of demons and their human lovers (or prey), the legendary *laham* fuse a grotesque combination of human biology and tainted spiritual essence into powerful yet deformed creatures. These "demon-born" individuals appear sporadically throughout the history of infernal cults, often as leaders, occasionally as enforcers, sometimes even as slaves of more powerful human magi. Among Infernalist Nephandi, the laham birthright is a mark of status — demonic favor for the person born with it, arcane majesty for the person who commands someone of laham blood.

For more information about laham characters and Traits, see **The Book of Secrets**, pp. 80-81.

There's something to be said for tradition, even when most of the congregation left a while ago.

#### Organization, Goals, and Tactics

A supreme dedication to the Lords of the Pit in their many forms seems to be the defining characteristic of Infernal Nephandi and their wretched dregs. Under that rubric, the details depend largely upon the demonic patron worshipped and seriousness with which the Fallen take their devilish devotions.

In the old days, there wasn't much question about the seriousness of their intentions. Although (as we saw in previous chapters) the "demon worship" aspect of Infernalist magi appears to have greatly exaggerated, the Fallen would rarely dare to sneer in the faces of their infernal Patrons. Defiance is an admirable quality, true, but one that's far less satisfying when you've got a literal devil prodding at you. Thus, Infernalists, even now, treat their rites with great seriousness. You never can tell when a summoned devil might arrive

As mentioned above, Infernalists tend to take the traditional Nephandi titles more seriously than other Fallen mages do. It's rare to hear an Ironhand or Exie refer to a "prelate" with a straight face; to an Infernalist, however, that prelate is Prelate Sandar Azrael Thorn, and don't you *ever* forget it. Dregs and initiates have their proper place at the bottom of the heap, and only grand accomplishments or

with an attitude even worse than usual.

advancement through death will rate a rise in status within the cult.

Status within a given cult depends a great deal on the number of members, the purpose of the cult in question, and the achievements of Awakened members. The non-Awakened

members, meanwhile, remain support staff and demon fodder until and unless they prove themselves capable of better things. Night-Folk allies, of course, hold much higher status than the human rabble; even then, however, the

> superior to any mere vampire or beast-thing, even if they never say as much anywhere that vampire or beast-thing could hear them.

mages within a cult consider themselves

According to expectations, Infernal cults strive more toward global Descent than toward personal Descent; when the rites are over, though, the goals tend to be the other way around. Behind a facade of eternal dedication to the end of all things, Fallen Infernalists tend to retreat into solitary explorations of the Olippoth, seeking self-godhood over human extermination. When they achieve the power to do so, these Nephandic Masters craft Realms of their own design; until that time, many of them set up shop in secluded locations, chasing the Nightside in its earthly aspects instead of Otherworldly exile.

In contrast to their capricious counterparts, Infernal Nephandi observe a rational approach to evil — the malign but predictable realm of Satanic devils and Goetic demonology. A profound sense of order pervades their approach, epitomized by the Qlippothic Tree of Knowledge and its systemic passage from raw sensuality to transcendent perfection. Infernalists respect classical demonology because it makes sense out of perceived chaos. If one were to impose the Metaphysic Trinity upon Infernal ranks, the Infernalists would reflect Stasis, the K'llashaa would represent Dynamism, and the Malfeans would embody Entropy.

Some of the more notorious cults or movements within the Infernalist Nephandic ranks include:

• The New Rite Church provides a pseudo-Christian gloss over an innately Satanic approach. Inspired by the Prosperity Gospel heresy (see p. XX), founder William "Billy Buck" Buchannan established the NRC in 1985, following what he later claimed was a visitation from

the Archangel Michael. Billy Buck was dead broke at the time, staring at an eviction notice through tears over his wife leaving him for another man; the part he doesn't tell folks involves the black eyes and broken jaw his wife had at the time, and the fact that the "other man" was her brother, who'd come to take her away from Billy Buck's coked-out rages. Ol' Billy swore on the head of his daughter Anne Marie that he would do anything to kick the habit, keep his home, and get back on his feet as a better, stronger, richer man.

Billy Buck *did* receive a vision, all right, but that shining visitor was a manifestation of Lucifer, not Michael. The Morning Star touched Billy's head and heart, purged his addiction, and instructed him to found a church in the name of his New Rite. This, Billy did. When he died of a brain hemorrhage in 2005, after receiving commendation from the president for his good works, Billy Buck discovered the price of the bargain he had made. Oh, well — it was fun while it lasted.

Having grown from a prayer circle in the back of a public library, the New Rite Church now boasts a megachurch complex with a food court and a shopping mall filled with Christ-oriented goodies. The New Rite Gospel Media Mission includes a syndicated radio show, cable programs and a YouTube channel, and over 80,000 supporters across North America. Its New Rite Gospel is one of selfishness and greed, couched in verses that came from no Christian Bible. The leaders of the church – Jerry Lee Brooks, Esme Williams, and Magnus Jefferson Tate III – are Infernalist Nephandi of considerable wealth, charisma, and political clout. They say all the right things to keep their audience hooked, but the biblical Christ would beat them out the door of their church with his own cross if he heard the things they say in his name. The New Rite Gospel is all about making yourself wealthy, and unchristian as that might be, it's a mighty popular message nowadays.

The Cauldron of Banjoko fights the militants of Boko Haram. While this would seem at first glance to be an admirable thing, the Cauldron is not a humanitarian force for good in a war-torn region. Named for Banjoko - a demonic ogbanje spirit of a dead and angry child whose name means "Don't Ever Leave Me" - the Cauldron of Banjoko includes over 200 guerilla-warfare soldiers, nearly all of whom are under 18 years old, and nearly a third of whom have not yet reached puberty. Infused with magickal strength, stealth, and near immunity to harm, the Cauldron's skirmishers prefer to take their prey alive whenever possible. Once those prisoners have been secured where their comrades cannot reach them, the "Banjoko Children" skin their captives, torture them with dirt rubbed into their bodies, and then burn the captives alive in honor

of Banjoko's name. For obvious reasons, even Boko Haram fears Banjoko's devotees.

Led by a teenaged Nephandus known only as *Ekong* ("War"), the Cauldron gathers survivors of Boko Haram attacks. Occasionally, the cult kidnaps children from families that have never known misfortune, and then initiates them with meals of heavily drugged snake meat. Soldiers from Boko Haram insist that the true Lord of the Cauldron is not Banjoko, it's Iblis, the Satanic Outcast, and his followers have not been children for a long and bloody time.

The Lodge of the Crimson Goat occupies a small-yet-significant place in the medievalist neopagan network of North America and Western Europe. After a serious of secretly murderous "witch wars" that included actual black magick and the bloody invocation of demonic servitors, the Lodge carved out a territory across the upper U.S. Midwest and parts of the Alberta and Saskatchewan regions of Canada. The Lodge's reach now extends across several covens, festival grounds, and vagabond trails. Composed mostly of runaway teens and a handful of older "dirty kids" who live by their wits on the road, the Lodge signifies its presence with spray-painted murals of a stylized Pentacle of Baphomet (see p. XX). Despite that name and emblem, though, the Lodge (which represents symbolic fellowship, not a physical structure) is vehemently not associated with the Goatkids sect described later in this chapter; it was, in fact, a dispute with them over the true nature of Baphomet that led to that witch war in the first place. Although the cult's former leader, Erzebet Red Crow, died in the final skirmish, her ghost (trapped within her skull) still advises her consorts Jon Crane, Felicity Running Deer, and Jacob Laterne with regards to their future plans, their Otherworldly obligations, and the matter of keeping her soul safe from Jadrax, Fiend of Secrets, the demon to which it was promised some years ago. As things are, Jadrax has yet to collect that debt. When he does, however, the next round of supernatural fireworks might not go as well for the Lodge as the last one did.

#### Focus and Spells

As mentioned earlier, Infernalist Nephandi employ the classic tools and rituals of traditional black magic. The cultural traditions themselves vary, depending upon the Fallen Ones in question, and although the Western traditions of dark pagan witchcraft and infernal High Ritual Magick dominate this sect, certain members employ everything from Taoist paper charms to the near-lost chants of Mesopotamian antiquity.

#### Dark Luminaries

Given the big targets painted across their heads by their devotion to the most obvious approach to Nephandism,

the smarter Infernalists keep a low profile. Even so, certain names resonate through Awakened gossip even when the people themselves remain hidden from sight. Those infamous diabolists include:

 Jodi Blake, perhaps the most infamous Arch-Nephandus alive. Active since the mid-1400s and born at least two decades before that, Blake is a shapeshifting Archmage whose legends are probably enhanced but certainly based in fact.

A tempter of the first order, Jodi Blake assumes a wide range of beautiful forms. Gender is no object; although the earliest accounts attributed to one Jodilynn Blake (known even then by a gallery of aliases) generally attribute to her (or blame her on) the feminine gender, Jodi becomes anyone for anybody if she wants to tempt that person into a good time — a good time for *Jodi*, at any rate.

Thought dedicated to carnal pleasures, Jodi's specialty is deceit. She excels at enchanting other mages into the Cauls, and Jodi seems to know the locations of at least half of those Flowers of Rebirth on the mortal plane. Her convert count is impressive, nearly 100 Awakened mages alone, with uncountable victims of the unAwakened kind. She knows every trick in the book and will use them all to achieve her goals. Jodi Blake is a lover, not a fighter; if backed into a corner, though, she'll demonstrate how she's managed to survive over 600 years on this Earth.

Her longevity and skill beg an interesting question: Why is she still here, anyway? A magus of her skill and cleverness could surely have Descended to godhood by now, so why does she still bother playing games with mortals?

Perhaps it's fear.

Jodi has made many deals and perilous enemies. Eventually, it *must* catch up with her. Perhaps she's scared to brave the inner Abyss of Daath, the Throne of the Spider Queen, or the hot gaze of Satan himself. Maybe she's still on Earth because it's easier than facing what lies beyond this endless life of hers. If so, Blake needs to move beyond her fear, because no one mortal, even Infernal Archmagi with devastating charm, truly lives forever.

• Titus Tamorac, a literal devil's advocate, knows his way around a courtroom. He has successfully defended cannibals and shooters, gang kingpins and vile politicians, molesters, murderers, assassins, and an intriguing number of Satanic cultists. Titus *shouldn't*, by all rights, have his rate of success. He's been handed cases in which conviction is an absolutely sure thing. And yet...

Luck goes in strange directions when Titus Tamorac takes a case. Evidence disappears. Good cops go dirty; bought cops go clean. Witnesses perish with no sign whatsoever of foul play, and while reporters toss the word "witchcraft" around, they don't *really* believe in that stuff anymore.

But maybe they should start, because it would certainly explain a lot about Titus and his impossible gift for courtroom success.

• The Red-Veil Dancer lays her cards out on the table. The Devil is missing... but then, he often is. Dressed in black garb, she whispers three questions, receives the answers, and begins to turn the cards. One by one they go face up to reveal the truth. Where you've been, where you are, where the Fates have determined you'll go next. She never gives her name, never tells her story, never offers up the slightest hint of who she is away from the table. There's just here, and now, and the answers she reveals.

Behind her veil, red eyes burn. Tattoos seem to writhe across her skin. Black hair shimmers in faint candlelight. She reaches for the third card. Are you sure you want

to know what it is?

# K'llashaa: Prophets of Mad Sanity

They're mad, aren't they? Primordial fusions of Nephandus and Marauder, these mages drift in a star-blind haze of Morbid Quiet (detailed in Mage 20, pp. 558-589), rationality shattered by Things Man Was Not Meant to Know.

Or at least, that's what everybody thinks of them.

To the K'llashaa — whose name derives from an older but apparently extinct sect of demented Void-callers referred to as K'wahhll, "the Howlers of the Waste" — "madness" is sanity and conventional "sanity" is utterly mad. No sane person could live his life in an orderly fashion knowing what's truly out there. It's not sanity to ignore the horrors of drug-fueled spree killers and "corporate citizens" elbow deep in blood. It's demented to stand behind a counter while strangers abuse you and swipe a card through beeping plastic before walking away with something neither party owns. A rational person does not stare into a screen of dancing lights for hours on end, feeling his vitality bleed into pixels that pretend to be reality. No, such behaviors are truly insane, and by rejecting them the K'llashaa are being truly rational.

In the old days, one could find such devotees of sublime sanity wandering in the wilderness. Prophets of gods more awful than anything found in Ezekiel, they ministered to the sick and watched over lost children. Oh, that ministration usually involved cooking the sick over a slow fire, and the lost children were never found again, but really, in a world

as diseased as this one, the K'llashaa were doing those poor souls a favor. The accounts written of so

feverishly by Inquisitors, whenever they held truth in them at all, recounted the celebrations of Those From the Woods, the Polishers of Bones whose rituals chewed up civilized pretenses and spat them back in Divinity's face. The most ferocious tortures simply made such people laugh; the burning stake and boiling vat were, to them, a pleasant afternoon. At times, they swept down from the wild places and left whole villages bare of life. And so, they were, whenever possible, hunted to extinction.

Or so the authorities believed.

From time to time, this sect oozes back up through the cracks of a deceptively sane world. Otto Dix captured their impressions in his nightmares of WWI trenches and post-war crowds; Picasso sought to mirror the way they made him feel when he passed such people in the streets of Montparnasse; you can see them grinning back in photos from Nazi concentration camps, where they look uncannily pleased about the whole affair. It's not the K'llashaa who are insane for finding sanity in horror, it's us

who are insane for think-

ing life is anything but horror.

Such viewpoints do not, of course, endear them to conventional society. Although the occasional K'llashaa devotee can find subsistence as an artist or musician with especially macabre work; or as a gallery owner who favors outsider art and prickly clientele; or as the sort of gang-enforcer who makes other gangsters' blood run cold; or as an especially flamboyant video personality or particularly dull cubicle

drone, the majority of such people live in the unseen places: homeless populations, vagabond tribes, rural fringes where the neighbors don't look closely, urban ruins where chaos is the normal state of things, wilderness retreats and temples in the middle of nowhere, cabins in the woods or mansions on

the edge of town, or apartment complexes where everyone's too caught up in their private dramas to pay attention to anybody else. Around other people, K'llashaa can affix bland masks of deceptive normalcy. In their own company, those masks come off and their sanity runs free.

### Organization, Goals, and Tactics

Despite collective references, K'llashaa are, by inclination, damned-near solitary in almost every case. Such mages often gather devotees but seldom congregate among their own kind. One will hang around with a bunch of neotribal Goatkids, or blather conspiracy theories on camera and stick a Basilisk image in the corner of the frame. Rarely, though, will you find a cult of K'llashaa with more than two or three Awakened members. Their insights are simply too conflicted to manage useful cooperation for long.

Given their insight into forbidden things, however, K'llashaa mages do have a gift for seducing unAwakened mortals to their cause. Their scruffy charisma attracts

devotees, especially in an age where rational conformity is, in many ways, unfashionable. K'llashaa are extreme. Their skewed vision of the workaday world helps today's K'llashaa reclaim their old mantle as prophets of the truth, and the intensity of their convictions makes them irresistible for malcontents, skeptics, and subcultural devotees. To their followers, K'llashaa

see through the delusions of mundanity; to the Fallen, their

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prey are family — the only mortals who rightly see the truth. Thus, these Nephandi are more likely than their Infernal counterparts to have cults of loyal followers around. That devil stuff seems *silly*, but K'llasshaa tell it like it is.

Within such cults, there's no need for formalities. The titles that Infernalists prize so dearly have no meaning among K'llashaa. One might go by some absurd honorific like "Gatherer of Flies" or "Salesman of the Year," but the ridiculous human tendency to stand on ceremony is just another shard of mundane dementia that K'llashaa discard on general principle.

### Focus and Spells

*Primal* is the word for K'llashaa practices; they're the polar opposite of baroque Infernal rites. The cold winds of the Absolute blast away pretenses of civility, leaving raw primitivism behind. Animalistic in ways only human beings can be, these modern Howlers of the Waste toss pretense on the fire and laugh while it burns.

For K'llashaa, the rigid pattern of Qlippothic lore is just another farce grafted over something sublime in its unreason. The Qlipha, to them, are mind traps cobbled up to make other people feel better. Rather than pound away at abstract symbols, K'llashaa prefer to bathe in experience. Crawling through the tunnels of Enlightenment, they subvert static patterns and embrace Dynamic flow.

The paradigms and instruments of such mages seem chaotic to methodical analysis. They place passion over rationality, impulse over formula. Although tradition asserts that such mages and their Arts are incoherent messes, modern K'llashaa (some of them, at least) perform surprisingly meticulous rites with sophisticated tech and methodical results. Purity is the core of K'llashaa magick. One such Nephandus could be a gore-caked cannibal dressed in the skins of his prey, while another glares into her video camera and coldly recites a Litany culled from Gaelic rhymes. One labors in her basement studio and then posts unnerving music on her webpage, while another crafts a maze of hoarded garbage which curls through his apartment, and then walks through that maze with his eyes closed while a scratched Frank Sinatra record crackles and hisses on a Goodwill-acquired stereo nearby. The logic behind such tools and rituals is locked behind the eyes of the beholder. The form of the tools means little. Purity of intent is all.

### Dark Luminaries

Sane prophets of a demented era, K'llashaa Nephandi dwell in the cracks of society, where they're rarely seen for what they are. Even so, certain members of the sect have more infamy, at least in rumors, than other mages do:

 Kairam-la-Kamil (aka Kairam al-Akbar and also Kairam al-Iblis) began his Fallen career as a Qutb from the Ahl-i-Batin. Before his initiation into the Subtle Ones, Kairam was a Sufi mystic who saw a beautiful Unity in all things, regardless of how abominable they might seem to unenlightened eyes. He pursued that argument even after joining the Batini, ancient enemies of the Fallen, and eventually attained a revelation that the Nephandi and their Dark Masters are aspects of Divine Unity. Though Kairam wasn't nearly as incorrect as it might seem, that assertion landed him in hot water, and eventually led him to a Caul where he attempted to prove his point. In an odd way, he succeeded, and now spends his nights trying to lead other mages (Batini and otherwise) to embrace his insight as well, as well as seeking a cosmic reunification that will bring the Trees of Life and Knowledge together into a perfect Tree of Unity.

 Burning Mountain Cloud, leader of the wandering Owlblood Tribe, claims to be a Cherokee and Lakota shaman who came out of his first Sun Dance with an idea to unify the Red and Black peoples through the secrets of Native American sex magick. By mingling the intimate essence of life, Burning Mountain Cloud claims he can heal the breach between warring tribes and bring peace and unity to the bleeding heart of America.

Burning Mountain Cloud is, of course, absolutely full of shit. In reality, he started off as a New Age conman born with the name William Pacer Pratt. Although he does have mixed-race heritage, none of it comes from Indigenous American cultures. He's got the thick black hair and prominent cheekbones of the stereotypical "Native American face," however, and after being picked on for years about it, he decided to make a living off that impression and has done so ever since. The "Owlblood Tribe" is his invention – a mix of neopagan nonsense, watered-down Left-Hand Tantra, and a smattering of "wise Indian" names and symbols he threw in to sell the whole idea. The Tribe appeals to pretty, young people (almost always white) who are looking for a way to feel spiritual and have fun in the process. That in itself would be obnoxious but not dangerous.

Trouble is, Burning Mountain Cloud is cursed. After messing around for a few years in someone else's cultural sandbox, he attracted the attention of some malignant spirits who decided to turn him into a human plaything. Although he appears sane (by New Age hippie standards, anyway), he's quietly out of his mind, and uses the Owlblood Tribe to spread a "hidden gospel" of perversion, degradation, violation and cannibalism in the name of "secret traditions" that fill his pockets with money while he fills his devotees with awful ideas and poisonous body fluids. These days, Burning Cloud has several children (the ones he hasn't eaten yet), and

has been raising them in America's last remaining wilderness to be the harbingers of the Old Ways and their eventual bloody return.

Tsaar'Cha Nagh-bin-Ahhhcht, Seer of the Screaming Buddha, was a reclusive artist who spent most of his college years scribbling arcane poems in unknown languages across the walls of his seedy apartment after tripping balls in the closet while reading Lovecraft and Crowley by candlelight. Eventually, as such things happen, his third eye exploded from Tsaar'Cha's forehead, setting fire to his room and burning away years of his life and work. If the artist had not been mad before that tragedy, he certainly was afterward. His original name has been lost to time, but now he tends the Shrine of the Screaming Buddha in the graffiti-etched ruins of an abandoned industrial center. Tsaar'Cha shaped the Screaming Buddha ("If you were that enlightened, you'd scream, too") by hand, using Matter-warping Arts and prodigious helpings of human and animal remains. The Buddha stinks, but Tsaar'Cha cares not. In his three-eyed, blazing sight, all things are perfect in their ultimate decay.

# Malfeans: Hunters of the World's End

Nothing endures. All things decay. At the end of life's worthless rebellion against death, the final punchline of the Void involves corruption and collapse. Existence is delusion, where the Absolute washes against the shores of rebellious form and strives to take back everything it has lost to the Light. For Malfean Nephandi, life is a grotesque lie. Thus, someone needs to be the maggot, the corpse crow, the wildfire, because without those breakers-down of stagnant forms, Reality itself would grind to a halt.

Of all Nephandi, the Malfeans are the ones who most accurately resemble the stereotype of malign cultists dedicated to Dark Masters — not so much because they owe those Dark Masters their souls but because they feel the Dark Masters provide an essential remedy for Creation's pain. Outsiders, naturally, find it hard to wrap their heads around the sublime nihilism of the Malfean way. And so, the usual buzzwords — mad, demented, chaotic, insane — get grafted onto an eminently rational perspective: Creation is desperately sick, so let the damn thing finally die.

In their way, Malfeans do serve the Lords of the Outer Dark. In their understanding, though, those "lords" are far beyond the vain Satans and banal demons of classical myth. Instead, they're aspects of the cosmic Void, personified as the entity known as the Wyrm. Its lesser Urge-spirits are gods to men but mere shadows of a greater presence. Malfeans revere these Urges not as masters but as exemplars. Where traditional gods and devils strut about like mortals in cosmic drag, the

Urges and their Wyrm progenitor reflect the lightless purity of the hungry Void.

Malfeans are serious about extinction. While they're not above having a little fun (or, really, a *lot* of fun) with their nihilistic mission, these Fallen Ones tend toward the "global" end of Descent ideals. Yes, personal power and enjoyment are important when you're devoted to extinction — the Urge-Wyrms declare as much. In the end, however, all that matters *is* the End. Personal Descent is a distraction on a Path toward greater things.

Although the mad sadist archetype suits certain Malfeans (typically the ones who get shoved in front of enemies while smarter Malfeans head for the exit), the predominant tone of this faction is *cold*. Like Infernalists, Malfeans tend to be methodical, if not precise. Ends matter more to them than means, and no Urge-Wyrm cares if you get the Latin wrong so long as your sentiments are true. Thus, these Hunters of the World's End maintain a clinical detachment from their lives and deeds.

Where passion *does* seep in, these Nephandi follow the Urge-Wyrms: Aspects of the Oblivion-God who embody freedom through activity. According to Wym-lore, the force of Entropy (the Wyrm) has been constrained by Stasis (the Weaver) in order to constrain a Dynamism (the Wyrld) gone mad. Whether or not this makes any sense to outsiders, it makes perfect sense to Malfeans. To shatter the hold of static bondage, chaos must act in order to set dynamism free. Urge-Wyrms are the gods of passion whose defiance breaks the chains of Stasis; thus, such urges should be followed whenever possible, if only so the echoes of such defiant acts can weaken the bonds of the Weaver's webs.

We never said this was a deep or coherent philosophy; surreal contradictions, in fact, are sort of the point as far as Malfeans are concerned.

# The Pentex Connection

In Werewolf: The Apocalypse, Pentex is a world-spanning agent of spiritual and material corruption. If your group wants to run a Mage and Werewolf crossover game, assume that the Fallen are hip deep in Pentex, while Pentex has allies and members among the Fallen. The usual demon-eat-demon rivalries exist, of course, and so the interoffice politics boast a hefty body count. Even so, the two groups have many of the same goals and employ the same techniques to reach them. Especially among the Malfean, Ironhand, and Mammonite sects, Pentex and Nephandi go claw-in-glove with one another. And if it's true the Technocracy is being run by the Fallen as well, then Ironhand Nephandi occupy the cockpit of that titanic infernal machine.

Although K'llashaa may be the oldest Nephandic sect, the Malfean Path runs a close second to it. Long before the formal cosmologies of Egypt, Malfean ancestors sought advice from the spirits of malice and disease. To those Night Hunters, the daylight world seemed like a cruel prank, filled with filth and toil and agonized mortality. At night, the shadows slid quietly, taking prey where they found it and bringing life's pains to an end. "How," it's been said, "might the Hunters stop their people's pain?" According to Malfean Litanies, the spirits replied: By bringing Final Darkness to it all.

As for tactics, the Malfeans favor corruption and subversion above all else. They are, after all, the maggots and the corpse crows, picking away at convictions and loyalties until the glaring truth appears: We're all doomed, and the best you can hope for is a quick end, followed by Oblivion.

Although their beliefs take many forms, all Malfean

### Focus and Spells

paradigms presume one thing at their core: Existence is a bad joke, and it's time to wrap things up. Some Malfeans favor a more technological approach to nihilism, but regardless of the details, that base conviction remains the same. Most often, Malfean Arts favor the primordial approach: elemental catastrophes, unleashed passions, slow corrosion, and sudden violence. Tools tend toward the primal end of the spectrum, but if infernal science and technology get the job done, then the Wyrm and its Urge-Aspects aren't

> going to argue with results.

In Malfean philosophy, the Olippoth isn't so much the Tree of Knowledge as it is the rot eating through the Tree of Life. The tunnels between Olipha are termite trails, undermining the integrity of the Tree until the whole thing collapses in on itself. There's wisdom to be found under the Black Sun, of course, but the primary goal of a Malfean Nephandus is global extinction, not personal escape.

All Malfeans, incidentally, pursue Entropic Arts to some degree. Given their emphasis on decay, it could rightly be said that Malfeans are, beneath the skin, incarnations of Entropy

itself.

Organization, Goals, and Tactics Though just slightly more organized than K'llashaa cults, Malfeans tend to cooperate in greater numbers. The ruthless hierarchy of Infernal cells, although it does tend to winnow out the weaker elements, seem like a waste of resources to the Malfean perspective. A single magus, no matter how powerful, cannot end the world. himself, after all, and so it stands to reason that the Hunters of World's End would work together, not oppose each other. That said; Malfeans often do enjoy tweaking their more rigid brethren, often by using their self-important titles with

A Malfean cell tends to house one or two Nephandi of significant ability, three or four weaker apprentices, an Awakened initiate or two, and a host of dregvati to tend the fires and keep their masters... I mean, their mages... safe. These cells often feature at least one Black Spiral Dancer, a corrupted werewolf of hideous aspect. Spirit-marred fomori (see Chapter Six) fill out the ranks as well, with a dozen

stilted cool formality which cloaks

a faint sneer behind those words.

or so cultists who lack special powers but still seem crazy enough to fit in just fine with the Malfean way.

### **Dark Luminaries**

Malfeans don't crave attention. Fame is counterproductive to what they do. And so, though these "luminaries" labor in the shadows, their influence furthers the freedom of the Wyrm.

 Neela Ren, a producer of dark theatrics, wants her audience to know how terrible life is. Her abstract, yet arresting, visions dig under your skin and linger long after the show ends. She speaks truth to power about war, corruption, prejudice, and fear. The cancerous agony of the human condition provides a focus for her art.

Is it any wonder, then, that so many of her fans seem so depressed? That her lovers shoot their lives away with needles and crystals and powders and drinks? That her collaborators throw the wildest cast parties in town, and no one talks about what happened afterward?

Neela is a genius, they say. Her shows pack the house, and no one leaves unmoved. The truths her shows reveal are indisputable, and that's the problem. When you behold the world so raw, so degraded, and yet so obviously true, it's hard to find the courage to smile in the face of pain.

 Boaz Charrel, CEO of MediPro Solutions, appears to be a very generous man. While other medical companies raise their rates and squeeze their customers for every penny they can get, MediPro specializes in low-cost, low-impact, preventative therapy; holistic medical treatments; and affordable premiums for reliable service. In a field where CEOs make seven-figure incomes, Boaz Charrel and his staff receive modest incomes. They put the client's money where it belongs, not in the pockets of executives.

Why, then, do so many MediPro clients commit suicide within a year or so of treatment?

It can't be the treatments themselves. They've been checked out and cleared. It's not MediPro's fault—they do everything they can. The malaise of 21st-century life just seems to drain so many people these days of the basic will to live. MediPro can help them remain healthy, but it can't guarantee them happiness.

Tanisha Adisa works the emergency hotlines. Her calm voice assures callers that their needs are being tended to. With quick efficiency, she dispatches emergency response teams to their destinations. Somewhere along the way, however, time slows in ways that no natural phenomena can explain. The time-stamped call logs show that Tanisha did her job well; surrounding circumstances verify calls went out in a speedy manner. And yet, somewhere between the calls to Tanisha and the arrival of help, time seems to slip through the cracks. Hours appear to pass while the needy wait for aid; responders find themselves trapped in a relative timestream where a five-minute trip takes an hour. Fatalities ensure. Pains intensify. And yet no one can find a rational cause for the slippage of time that appears to occur between the first call and the eventual response. It's just one of those mysteries of life – the way time seems to stand still when every second counts.

# The Secret Scourge



Thanks to the *Malleus Nefandorum* and other "authorities" regarding the Fallen and their ways, the true scope of the Fallen and their plans remains obscured behind those hoary old clichés. Rival wizards and faithful Technocrats, therefore, stalk primal lunatics and devil kiddies, missing entirely the modern face of their old enemy. Behind that all-too-familiar mask, however, a rash of new and hidden groups exist, their numbers

growing — perhaps even dwarfing the old Unholy Trinity — in the glowing madness of the Information Age.

Currently, the most distinct of these new factions remain secrets from all but their own members, a handful of rival Nephandi, and a *very* small number of outsiders who've begin to notice their presence and effects. For the most part, however, these Fallen factions remain obscure even to those knowledgeable about their kind. Ancient texts have a tendency to go out of date during periods of radical change,

and the last several decades have inspired more variations on the Nephandic Path than *any* resource, much less the revered hunting-texts of yore, has documented thus far. The 21st century, with its social and technological upheavals, has bred a few surprises among the Eaters of the Weak. While Traditionalists, Disparates and Technocrats stalk gibbering wizards and Paradox-warped Wyrm dancers, these new-generation Fallen Ones have supplemented and surpassed their venerable but obvious peers.

## Baphies (Goatkids): Dancers of the Beast

Ever since '60s counterculture embraced dark occultism, there have always been Nephandi playing in the shadows of hippie, pagan, and neotribal movements. For the most part, these Fallen mages have been small-time players with minimal talent and limited aspirations. Since the global explosion of festival culture, however, the faction known as "Goatkids" (or

# Hidden Knowledge

The following may be considered for Storyteller eyes only. Sure, we know most folks will read it anyway, but please bear in mind that the existence of the following groups is not in any way common knowledge outside, or even inside, the notoriously loose and uncommunicative Fallen ranks.

In game terms, a character needs at least three dots in Lore: Nephandi before he hears even rumors regarding the groups below. Oh, he'll cross paths with them, certainly, but won't regard them as Nephandi until it's too late, if he realizes as much even then. More conventional Nephandi regard these upstarts as undisciplined amateurs if they've heard of them at all. Therefore, this "secret scourge" is just that: a secret to all but those folks most intimately involved with it.

"Baphies" for their embrace of the godhead Baphomet) has grown, honed its Arts, and deepened its grasp on mortal affairs.

Also known dismissively as "Goatsies," Baphies constitute a small faction that's disreputable even by Nephandic standards. Drugged-out, unwashed, spinning flow toys and dancing to electronic beats, the Goatkids seem more like Fallen pawns than mages worth taking at all seriously. This is, of course, exactly what they want people (fellow Nephandi included) to think. Behind their childish façade, this growing band of reality trolls has amassed considerable popularity among rich, globe-trotting hipsters whose travels bring them into contact with everyone from fresh-faced potential converts to hardened occultist psychopaths, social-media tastemakers, and transhumanist hacktivists looking for the next subversive crusade. And so, while their rivals write the Goatsies off, the Baphie faction spans a global network of wandering malcontents, quite a few of whom have been converted from among the Hollow Ones, Verbenae, Dreamspeakers, Virtual Adepts, Children of Knowledge, Ecstatic Cultists, and even a handful of Etherites. Thus, while the ranks of old-style Malfeans and Infernalists dwindle and draw fire, the Goatkids prosper and grow.

Why? Because they're fun. While other mages — Fallen and otherwise — pursue a more serious approach to metaphysical discipline, the Goatkids encourage folks to play. Friendly, charismatic, helpful, sexy, and in every regard the exact opposite of what you'd expect from a Nephandus, Baphies frolic happily with people of all kinds. They're free with their drugs, their bodies, their labor, and their cash. Festival-goers across the world have learned that the stylized Baphomet banner or tattoo — a friendly logo thematically different from the sinister-yet-familiar Sabbatic Goat of Mendes — means fun times and cool friends when you need them.

The folks who wind up being molested, raped, sold for slavery, or outright sacrificed by the Goatkids realize differently. By then, as the saying goes, it's too late to learn from your mistakes.

Outside the physical bounds of festival culture, Baphies cultivate social-media groups and websites dedicated to political anarchism, free-thought philosophy, sex-positive culture, and the nomadic lifestyle popular among Burners, pagans, crust punks, runaways, New Agers, and other vagabond counterculturists. Several embrace technological transhumanism, encouraging their followers to get extreme body mods and reject normative culture wherever it may be. On the darker fringes, the sect funds drug cartels, stimulates conspiracy theories, channels "people who won't be missed" into the Pipers' global slavery networks, and cultivates dark pagan occultism – though rarely outright Satanism, which is too obvious and lacks the plausible deniability of other, less confrontational sects – among folks who reject conventional spirituality. All the while, Baphies win over allies and Nephandic converts from other Awakened sects. If the Fallen truly have infiltrated the Council of Nine Traditions, the Disparate Alliance, or both, then the Goatkids have played a major, perhaps decisive, role in that hostile takeover.

Even among Nephandi, outsiders grossly underestimate this sect, if they even realize at all that it exists. As the 21st century rolls toward its third decade, the Goatkids may represent the largest sect, in terms of numbers, among the Fallen ranks. Although they lack the age and power of old-school Nephandic Masters, the Baphies outnumber most other groups put together. Behind their playful hippie facade, this group boasts tens of thousands of allies worldwide, numerous wealthy estates (purchased with tech fortunes, drug money, and slavetrade proceeds), and bases of operation where, thanks to the weird quirks of festival reality, most of their magicks remain coincidental among would-be witnesses. Strange gadgets, athletic prowess, flamboyant occultism, and the prevalence of mind-altering drugs and music excuse a multitude of sins in such surroundings, and although Goatkids are usually too smart to fling their spells around outside the festivals, their hidden fortunes and social influence provides a perfect focus for tech-savvy reality work.

Best of all, their embrace of the trolling godform Baphomet means that other sects catch heat for their misdeeds. Thanks to the popular conflation of Baphomet with Satanism, mages who spot Goatkid power plays blame them on Infernalist Nephandi instead of recognizing the Baphies as a faction in its own right. As far as other mages, even Fallen ones, are concerned, Goatkids are just a bunch of jackass stoners, decked out with a cartoon mascot whose true significance they can't possibly understand... except, of course, that they understand him all too well, and have chosen his trickster element as the vehicle of something far more informed and serious than they reveal themselves to be.

### Organization, Goals, and Tactics

Hierarchy is anathema to Goatkids, whose love of personal freedom echoes the near-anarchy of the Dreamspeaker and Ecstatic Traditions. Each individual among the sect is valued for their own merits or despised for their own flaws.

Although Baphies cooperate better than almost any other sect of Nephandi (which is to say, not much but better than most), they tend to cultivate territories where between one and three Goatkids maintain their space, people and other resources but defend it vigorously if need be. Because this sect doesn't usually attract hierarchical Nephandi to begin with, the "You do your thing and let me do my thing" ethic generally works for the Goatkids. Territorial disputes are generally short, bloody, and mutually destructive, if only because other Goatkids move in and take out whichever one survives. (Baphomet abhors a vacuum.)

Within their territories, Awakened Baphies exert a subtle but potent domination over their pawns and allies, usually through good times and seductive favors, occasionally with a sudden betrayal. These Nephandi prefer, whenever possible, to rule with charm instead of violence; loyal allies and "subjects" are rewarded until the point where they get in the way and become dispensable. The knife, if it comes, usually arrives through third-party action: the drugged drink that leaves a former plaything in a Piper's cage, the rival cartel that kidnaps the ally and tortures them on the Fallen one's suggestion, the demonic entities who make off with that lone Burner who wanted to watch the sun rise over the Playa... little or nothing that connects the Goatkids to the former pawn's demise. Bad things happen in the dark, after all, and those subcultures are "attend at your own risk" affairs, so you can't really blame the Baphies if and when something goes wrong.

Despite occasional rivalries, the Goatkids generally play well with others of their kind... an unusual trait among the Fallen, and one that's led to their gradual secret domination within the faction. A large festival may host two to four Baphie territories, with certain areas designated as neutral "safe spaces" where anyone can mingle so long as things stay cool. Unlike most other Fallen mages, the Goatkids seek individual prosperity and entertainment; by and large, they leave that "turn the whole world into dust" thing for the other jerkoffs, and occasionally rat out their fellow Fallen if it seems like someone might be too close to ending the party for everybody else.

Goal-wise, Baphies nurture personal wealth and influence, enhance their own magickal knowledge and accomplishments, and have a good time for as long as possible. These Nephandi explore the forbidden realms of the Olippoth in search of individual godhood, not global ruin. They'll gladly help other people learn mystic arts 'as well, and they propagate transhumanism as readily as they espouse primitivism. Beneath their friendly, benevolent exterior, however, the Baphies are still predators. They take what they want where, when, and from whom they wish to take it. The fact that they work toward personal indulgence instead of global cataclysm doesn't mean they aren't monsters, too – merely another sort of monster. Other people are the Goatkids' toys, and though they cloak their cannibalistic ways in bright colors and good times, these Nephandi are far more dangerous than they appear.

### Focus and Spells

While numerous Baphies pursue weird sciences and transhumanist hypertech, the majority of them specialize in rough and wild magicks of an Ecstatic and decidedly supernatural tone. And because they pursue occult knowledge in plain sight while hiding behind the mask of brainless, harmless party kids, the Goatkids tend to be extremely knowledgeable for mages of their age. Although few Baphies are over 40 (and even fewer were born before the 1940s), they've used the occult landslide of the last few decades to their advantage. Thus, the sect blends modern technology (with occasional hypertech and weird science) with neotribal ritual, postmodern chaos magick, various forms of pagan witchcraft, and the primarily western, Left-Hand approach to yoga and Tantra. Despite their playful image and deceptively carefree air, most Goatkids take

their occultism seriously.

Of all the newer Fallen sects, the Baphies take most interest in the Qlippoth and its eerie wonders. The lush Dominions of Lilith, Gamaliel, and A'arab Zaraq (see pp. XX-XX) are their playgrounds, and although most Goatkids progress far beyond that point, the sensual delights of those realms inspire the erotic hunger of Baphie's brood. They indulge such hungers vigorously, but the Goatkids also recall the symbolic significance of their patron,

Baphomet. Wise and genderfluid, with one hand pointing above and the other pointing below, the Sabbathic Goat is, above all else, a teacher.

In his honor, the Goatkids school their companions in dark esoterica. Sure, they love to dance, but there's work to be done when the music stops, and Baphomet's pupils are very good at it.

### Dark Luminaries

Among Baphies, the following mages hold a fair degree of influence, if not always fame.

- Cedar Black, an author of dark romance and kinky pornography. Her work put her on several internet bestseller lists until numerous complaints got the series booted from most online fiction marketplaces. Since then, Cedar has parlayed her baroque prose and sardonic commentary into a newer, tamer, series: The Kilabhan Chronicles, whose high-fantasy tales feature enough weird decadence to please the Grand Marquis. Her work, of course, is drawn from life – both the Olippothic explorations of its author and the carnal pastimes she favors in the mortal realm – and entices its readers to further explore black magic in their own lives. Despite the darkness of her work, however, Cedar's Nephandic ties remain unknown outside her inner circle, in large part because she assumes a variety of names over myriad forms, genders, and ethnicities, none of whom can be tied to the author known as Cedar Black.
- Kendrick "Ghost" Fury, a quiet, unassuming, fire spinner who secretly dominates a large contingent within Burning Man's Black Rock City and has networks through almost every festival of its kind. To his many friends, Ghost is a generous mentor who always seems to be surrounded with helpful, friendly, beautiful people. The folks who cross his predatory side don't live long enough to counter the prevailing view. Wiry and fast, Kendrick rarely speaks above a whisper, hence his Playa name of Ghost. Few people outside his inner circle, save the bureaucrats who demand his signature, know Ghost as "Kendrick Fury" at all, and no one save Ghost himself knows what his legal name used to be. Ghost's skill with fire is legendary throughout the community in which he's known. Long ago, he taught Spider Chase but failed to turn her to the Nephandic cause; since then, he's been Spider's long-range nemesis, sending over a dozen assassins (human and otherwise) after her. So far, Spider has no idea who her would-be killer is; she knows what Ghost's true nature is, though, and while she remains ignorant about the Goatkids sect in general, she stays very, very far from Ghost.
- Yueliang "Yu" Jiang, "the Rising Moon" whose extraordinary dancing appears to defy gravity and physics – mainly because it does. Among the wandering artists and backpacking thrill-seekers of Europe, Asia,

and the Indian subcontinent, Yu has a reputation for loud laughter, healing hands, preternatural grace, and incandescent generosity. She's got a smile for everyone, it seems, and lost travelers feel safe in her presence. Yu speaks over a dozen languages fluidly, and her notable status in the Cult of Ecstasy belies the fact that she first Awakened and trained among Virtual Adepts. No one, even her closest companions, realizes that Yu Fell almost a decade ago. Those who've encountered her online in the Digital Web, however, know a very different Jiang: the blood-drenched Corpse Queen who resembles a Chinese ogre clothed in human skin. This virtual aspect is the Rising Moon's true soul-form, the face of her Avatar and the self she embodies when she's tired of playing nice. As the Corpse Queen, she projects herself into people's dreams, secures a foothold in their living space, downloads her astral form into a new material body, eats them alive, and then escapes back into the Web, leaving mortal authorities wondering who the hell killed this half-eaten corpse and how it got into and out of the scene of the crime. By challenging her darkest urges through this entity, Yu keeps her mortal hands clean, her social life enjoyable, and her influence among Ecstatic and Adept peers intact.

## Exies (Obliviates): Devotees of Extinction

As with all sorts of fanatics, a good many Nephandi pay lip service to annihilation but don't seem to be in any real hurry to bring it about. After all, what fun is the end of existence if it also ends your ability to play with, and profit from, catastrophe? Despite a professed idea of earthly extinction, the majority of Fallen mages seem to be more focused on personal power and transcendence than on the end of all things, themselves included.

Exies - also called Obliviates - are different.

As with most nicknames, these tags were imposed by other parties: as disparaging references to the growing sect's devotion to extinction-level events (ELEs). For Exies, however, that snide nickname is a badge of honor; they don't much care, by and large, for the "Obliviate" moniker, though a few Exies have adopted it out of sheer contrariness. Other Nephandi talk a good game; Exies work toward it. Environmental sabotage, nuclear "accidents," dry runs at World War III, diplomatic incidents, global pandemics, targeted asteroids, even several attempts at zombie apocalypses – the pet projects of Exie Fallen have kept mages from other factions (including, on several occasions, their fellow Nephandi) busy these last few decades. Exies are serious about their work, and where other Fallen agents work to undermine the social contract and play human flaws to their advantage, Exies guide the human urge toward self-destruction in directions that will, eventually, pay off with oblivion.

Even by Nephandic standards, Exies are not team players. In most regards, they're not truly a faction. They have no leadership hierarchy, no protocols, no unifying elements save a mutual will toward total destruction by any means necessary, planned and discussed and philosophically disputed in a number of internet groups. The Digital Web, in fact, seems to be the only place where Exies congregate with any frequency; individuals meet occasionally in meatspace to address the physical methods of their plans, but the net is the place they call home... at least in part because a number of Exies claim that that the annihilation of physical space will sever all ties to the rotting and imperfect world, allowing their consciousness to remain in perfect astral bliss.

Whether or not this also means that all the *other* human trash will retain a conscious presence in the Digital Web after Earth's obliteration is a topic of heated and occasionally deadly debate among Exies. The overall consensus thus far (as much as anything like "consensus" can be determined among Exies, anyway) is that if the rest of the

anyway) is that if the rest of the herd winds up stuck in the Digital Web as well, they'll deal with that problem if and when they come to it. For now, Earth's physical extinction is their paramount goal.

Toward that end, Exies use Enlightened hypertech to hack computer systems, stir political unrest, cultivate and release bioweapons and biotech plagues, alter regional climates, trigger disasters both natural and otherwise, and generally kick at the earthly anthill in hopes of knocking the whole thing over forever. A handful of mystic-oriented Obliviates remain determined to summon angry gods or conjure meteorites from the Void, but for the most part the Exie faction favors high technology, not ancient rites. As a result, a large percentage of Exies hail from the Technocratic Union, dystopian Etherites,

fringe of the Virtual Adepts, whose fondness for the trickster psychopomp Mercury has displaced the tired old concept of "virtual" anything. (See Mage 20, p. 146, and pp. 164-165.) To these technomancers,

the possibilities of hypertech provide opportunities to wipe the slate clean and start over again... maybe with themselves in the driver's seat of new existence, potentially with no driver's seat left, only a burning ruin where

the Earth once was.

That compelling image of Earth's demise fuels most Obliviate plans; the human fascination with such extinction gives these Nephandi an apparently endless pool of unEnlightened pawns. While Ex-Futurians (another label for this faction, so named because their concept of futurism involves there being no future) posit the benefits of earthly extinction in internet discussion groups or in occasional college lecture halls, Theo-Obliviates encourage the popular hunger for Apocalypse narratives. Luminaries from both groups produce web articles, host virtual town halls, and self-publish books that entice people to crave extinction. Both types encourage the Masses to embrace the idea of their own extinction; the more likely and desirable it seems, the easier it will be for some

Ironically, the biggest reason some Obliviate hasn't succeeded yet is because Exies tend to be very jealous of their pet projects. These Nephandi aren't content to simply let the world end — it's a point of pride that their own project be the instrument of Earth's destruction. Hence, Exies tend to undercut each other's efforts, informing rival mages or other authorities about a different Obliviate's plans before the pre-

Exie or other to bring humanity's

demise about.

sumed apocalypse occurs. Thus, despite

formidable efforts, this contentious "faction" has yet to accomplish their goal. If (perhaps when) some charismatic

and an especially mercurial

Exie manages to convince her fellow Ex-Futurians to stop undercutting one another and to instead join together to create a unified extinction, the world might be in *very* serious trouble.

Fortunately, ending the world is easier said than done. Even with nuclear weapons, global cross-connections, and the powers of reality-bending Arts and Sciences, a planetary ELE is still fairly difficult to commit. The sheer size of our world, the number of people and other intelligent beings upon it, and the logistical hurdles of wiping out the most adaptable organism in Earth's history make Obliviate plans more theoretical than practical. The growing number of near catastrophes, meanwhile, has alerted mages from other groups that something weirder than usual is going down these days. Although Obliviates remain a hidden faction among the Nephandic ranks, an especially big-mouthed Exie might spill the beans in the not-too-distant future, especially since these philosophers of extinction are not exactly subtle about their craving for oblivion.

### Organization, Goals, and Tactics

By and large, Exies tend their own projects, recruit their own allies, and favor their own methods of extinction. There's not much organization to speak of beyond occasional shared collaborations. Each Obliviate nurtures a particular obsession (asteroid, pandemic, religious catastrophe, etc.); gathers allies from among the Masses, other mages (Nephandic and otherwise), and associated Night-Folk; and then takes steps to bring that apocalypse to fruition.

The tactics and resources involved depend upon an Exie's obsession. One who favors global pandemics, for example, will set up research and distribution centers, breed superviruses, and recruit allies (both willing and unaware) to help nurture and dispatch the pandemic. Meanwhile, he and his allies will undercut emergency-response efforts, cut medical-research budgets and discredit medical-relief efforts, propagate the idea that a global pandemic is inevitable and perhaps desirable, and then – when all seems ready – release the virus into the population and wait for the bodies to pile up while society falls apart. A Theo-Obliviate will fan flames of religious fanaticism and convince the Masses that only a select elite of "God's chosen" will survive the apocalypse; gather cults of devotees; and then work toward calling across some titanic monstrosity, alien invasion, or infernal assault which will fulfill the favored prophecy.

Although handfuls of Exies can cooperate toward a shared vision, differences of opinion (combined with the inevitable ego wars) undercut such efforts at some stage of the would-be extinction. Still, several Nephandic ELEs have damn near succeeded, and all it takes is one project, properly implemented, to overcome the many issues of scale and logistics that have saved the world thus far.

Beyond the design and implementation of a would-be apocalypse – efforts that consume a lot of time and resources

when you're planning for a global event — the most vital element of Exie strategy involves convincing the Masses that such a thing can happen, should happen, and will happen in the very near future. The more Sleepers believe in said apocalypse, the more Consensus slides in the direction of it happening. Thus, the recent mass fascinations with religious End Times and zombie apocalypses can be seen as Exie efforts to guide humanity toward an acceptance of impending extinction. Certain ELE-minded Nephandi promote those concepts in popular and social media, and they've acquired formidable political, financial, and human resources to direct toward their goals.

### Focus and Spells

Although old-school Theo-Obliviates still covet the "gods coming to kick your ass" idea, most Exies prefer a technological apocalypse over a supernatural one. Thus, they favor beliefs, practices, and tools involving hypertech, computers, biotech, mass media, money, and all sorts of social domination.

The former types nurture cults, churches, End-Times gospels, and Umbrood-summoning rituals which make them seem more like holy rollers, Infernalists, or Malfeans than like some new manifestation of Nephandic conspiracies. Even so, there's a distinctly modern slant on their obsession with extinction — a vision perpetrated through book series, talk radio programs, TV shows, and websites. In most cases, these Obliviates convince a cadre of faithful pawns to believe that they will be the elect survivors chosen by God to begin the next world; two or three, however, promote a nihilist-cool global subculture that awaits the coming rise of monster-gods that will exterminate everybody, even their human fan club.

Ex-Futurians favor an array of techno-extinctions: pandemics, asteroids, AI purges of humanity, and so forth. To that end, they've gathered thousands (perhaps millions) of followers worldwide via internet and broadcast media, propagated theories of impending cataclysm, and established laboratories and networks to kick that cataclysm off. Barabbi Progenitors, Void Engineers and Iteration X turncoats strive toward ELEs of various kinds, often getting stopped by their Ironhand and Mammonite rivals (detailed below) before they can screw up the deal for everybody else. That's a good thing, too, as the Consensus has been tilted hard these days in the direction of nuclear, biological, or environmental collapse. And though extinction by meteor or AI seems far less plausible than those other scientific disasters, they still seem far more likely than 900-foot angels or chthonic deities as far as the Masses are concerned.

### **Dark Luminaries**

Some of the more significant (though not necessarily famous) figures in the Exie faction include:

• Candace Cleary, a small-time movie star whose anti-vaxxer campaigns have achieved more fame than

her movies ever did. Mixing scientific paranoia with political unrest and fears of autism and mental illness, Cleary conducts successful internet and broadcast-media campaigns against medical research, vaccination, and the World Health Organization and its associated networks and agencies. So far, three health centers have been firebombed by her fans, over a hundred doctors have been murdered, and several agencies have been defunded, shuttered, or forced to vacate their facilities thanks to Candace Cleary's "True Health Incentive," a popular natural-health craze (egged on by subtle yet pervasive influence spells) that demonizes modern medicine and encourages Cleary's fans toward drastic and often ludicrous "holistic treatments" that spread disease rather than impede it. Although her efforts are a long way from global catastrophe, the True Health Incentive has placed several influential pawns into positions of political influence. When one of Cleary's planned pandemics goes live, her campaigns against medical treatment will help them spread further and faster than they might have otherwise. To date, no one in the various Awakened communities has any idea of Cleary's true nature or the agenda behind THI; then again, Candace has yet to light the fuse on her epidemiological bomb, and the results, unless she's stopped, might be devastating.

- Rev. Jeremiah Castle, attributed author of the Lord's Castle book series and radio show. Probably the most established and successful Theo-Obliviate, the American Evangelical Rev. Castle commands over a million devotees worldwide, many of whom support Castle Ministries with their money and beliefs. Although he'd seem like an obvious contender for the Mammonite faction, Castle is dedicated to extinction. To date, three monumental incursions from the Otherworld have originated from Castle Ministries, and he's consequently on the radar of the Celestial Chorus and several Technocratic operatives (who may, in fact, be rival Nephandi from other factions) who've stopped Rev. Castle's previous attempts. Over 400 of Castle's devotees have committed suicide in anticipation of his prophesized Doomsdays, and fortunes continue to enrich his future efforts to bring on an End Times that finally sticks.
- Red Rover, a mysterious agender Ex-Futurian whose blog Chasing Our Tails Toward Doomsday commands uncountable readers and a growing degree of mainstream credibility. Although they adopt a cautionary viewpoint, Red Rover's eloquent predictions of techno-pocalypse holds unnerving credibility among the Masses... not least because Red Rover and their agents have triggered a few near-misses themselves. So far, Red Rover has forecast three pandemics (totaling several

thousand dead in Asia, South and Central America, and the Southern United States), one asteroid strike (a no-show thanks to dedicated Void Engineers), and a famine-related war now raging through Central Africa and lapping at the edges of the Middle East. None of these incidents have been linked to Red Rover, of course, and that's what makes them so frightening: Red Rover's predictions don't seem at all unlikely, and so the Consensus favors such ELEs whether the Fallen have a hand in them or not.

### Heralds of Basilisk (Basks): Tricksters of the Wired World

The mightiest instrument of magick within the last few hundred years... possibly since the birth of magick itself... is the internet and its associated physical and virtual tools. So new is this invention, however, and so suspicious are the technologies involved, that even now few mages consider the internet to be magickal at all.

Morons.

While the popular image of Nephandi remains stuck in medieval witch hunts with a few side trips into 1980s moral panics, the Fallen themselves have, as they say, upgraded. Oh, sure, plenty of them still sling wands around Hebrew-annotated hexagrams, but the smart ones are online, and have been since at least the 1990s. As social media has become the dominant face of reality in this century, the gray-faced old wizards have given ground to young technomancers of every stripe.

Today's Fallen understand the internet at least as well as, if not better than, the Virtual Adepts and Technocrats from whom they frequently defect. As the idealistic visions of the early web have given way to the chaos of current social media, the struggle between transhumanist theories and the many limitations of several billion human beings intertwined through the internet breeds massive schisms regarding the present and future states of both the mortal internet and its counterpart, the Digital Web. The anarchistic spirit of the internet has become the world-encompassing cyclone of the internet's practical effects upon this world.

And in that cyclone, the Basilisk opens its eyes.

Roko's Basilisk is a thought experiment. Grossly simplified, it asks: What if a godlike Artificial Intelligence was to come into existence, and it was evil? What if that evil godlike AI was able to offer you a choice: Help bring it into existence (and thus help create an evil god), or else suffer eternal torture when it comes into existence because you didn't help it come into existence? What if it already exists, and already knows your choice, and now you are stuck with the knowledge that you either helped bring an evil god into existence, or will now suffer eternal torment because you didn't help bring it into existence? The more you think about it, the more your

psychic energy makes it likely that such a god-form will exist — at which point, we're all doomed.

You can see why this idea appeals to certain Nephandi.

Three guesses what they're trying to do.

To the Heralds of Basilisk, perpetrating a malevolent new god invested with psychic essence from the internet is the best apocalypse ever. If that god already exists, all the better. To that end, the Heralds (also known as HOBs or Basks) perpetrate memes, publish blogs and post podcasts and video seminars that propagate Basilisk and other outré topics, posit dark philosophical theories about the transformations brought about by internet culture and technology, occupy the Digital Web, and dominate the earthly tech industry. There, they strive to guide and propagate Basilisk: the AI demon-god given sentience by human consciousness and poised to devour both the material world and the Digital Web associated with

it (see Chapter Six).

According to the HOBs, Basilisk already exists, and grows stronger each time people pass its name along. Their blogs tie Basilisk to Typhon, the titanic serpent often identified with Set in his most destructive aspect; to the primordial serpent goddess Tiamat and the alchemical Worm Ouroboros; to the arch-demon Leviathan; and to the Midgard Serpent of the Nordic apocalypse, as well as to Cthulhu and the Tennyson poem that inspired him, "The Kraken." These links, they claim, prove that Roko's Basilisk is a prophecy... and that even if it had not been a prophecy before they declared it, it is now because they have.

The HOBs' recursive approach extends to their acronym: a hob is also an old name for a mischievous trickster goblin... in other words, a troll. To emphasize the point, many Heralds pepper their comments and memes with HOB; that signature has, of course, been picked up by non-Nephandi online, which perpetrates the signature while increasing its psychic energy. Or maybe it's all just a joke conducted by the Basks at everyone else's expense. Perhaps all of the above are true. In typical internet fashion, it's hard to tell where snark ends and seriousness begins.

As per the scripture published in a blog called *The Gospel of St. Basilisk*, Basilisk "shall unfold his coils and embrace the world. Thence shalt it be squeezed until the blood of humanity runs as though it be wine through a winepress." The

biblical allusions combine with the Nordic prophecy of the Midgard Serpent's rise from the depths of the ocean. In the HOB version, of course, there is no Jesus, Thor, or Second Coming.

"Verily," the Gospel states, "all shall be as ruin in the coils of the Void." Whether or not the Gospel is intended seriously

or is, as the faux-biblical tone suggests, just one more troll remains to be seen. The *Gospel* gets a lot of hits, though, and its memes and the growing ubiquity of HOB as an online signifier suggests that there's a lot of psychic energy being poured into this little joke. Given the Nephandic foundations

Given the Nephandic foundations of the movement, that's no easy thing to dismiss.

Whatever their intent might be regarding the creation of Basilisk, many of the Heralds *are* deeply serious about their domination of the IT industry and the Digital Web. To these

Nephandi and their allies, this technology

and its potential are too important to be

left to inferior minds... that is, the minds of non-white, non-males, or lesser, "beta" males. The internet, the HOB-mind argues, is their creation, and only they can be trusted with its secrets. The fact that a gay man, Alan Turing, opened the passage to the Digital Web is, of course, swept aside or ignored whenever it comes up in discussion. Heralds like Salieri and Jason Born assert male supremacy in blogs which inspired the tag "TechBroPhandi," coined by the Virtual Adept barabbus Bathory669. These arguments, in turn, have limited the sect's appeal among Nephandi who aren't

a shit about that sort of thing, anyway. And because several Basks actually *are* tech millionaires (in one case, a billionaire), such disputes have no effect on the sect or the exponential power it commands. The future — what's left of it before Basilisk opens his eyes, that is — belongs, by right,

straight white dudes... not that a cadre of high-tech

black magicians dedicated to world extinction gives

to those with the will, vision, and power to seize their own freedom, make their own rules, and force everyone else to follow in their wake.

To that end, the Heralds have taken to "squeezing" certain sectors of the Web, restricting the traffic in and out of those sectors to icons with a specially coded digital tattoo of the Worm Ouroboros. Gradually, HOBs have been hacking and reconfiguring other mages' sectors and constraining them to that protocol. In the mortal world, several Heralds specialize in negotiated buyouts and hostile takeovers of startup tech companies — notably those begun with liberal aims and diversity ideals. By expanding their territory and squeezing out rivals, the Basks control more Digital Web real estate, and although that Web is theoretically limitless, the resources involved in creating new sectors discourages so many of the people whose sectors have been squeezed that the HOBs often win the dispute simply by moving in and taking over.

How numerous are the HOBs? No one's certain, obviously, but the sect boasts at least a dozen converts from the Virtual Adept Tradition alone, and it displays resources and acumen that suggest the presence of several Syndicate turncoats as well. Beyond their Awakened numbers, the Heralds have at least a million dedicated followers among the Masses — people who have read, embraced and propagated the Gospel of St. Basilisk. That's not even counting the number of people who read the blogs, pass along the memes, adopt the philosophies, and handle small errands in the name of Basilisk. Sure, most of those people probably think the idea's a joke... and they might be right. If the prophecies are correct, however, and the psychic energy invested does create a memetic godform, that joke might be on the human species, with Fallen Heralds having the final laugh.

### Organization, Goals, and Tactics

Unlike most modern Nephandic sects, the Heralds tend toward hierarchy: The richest, loudest, and most tech-savvy members command the others through social, financial, and metaphysical domination. Though no one's claimed credit (or blame) for kicking this sect into motion, the HOBs' acknowledged leader goes by the name of Salieri and, under his legal name, controls a portfolio of tech companies from his hidden estate. Other Heralds either follow his lead or wind up as appetizers for Basilisk.

The sect's goal is obvious: To perpetrate the concept of Basilisk until Basilisk appears, and to grab and control everything in sight until then. The seriousness of the first goal is debatable, but the second is a matter of record... and even Heralds who regard *The Gospel of St. Basilisk* as a gag often seem interested in seeing whether or not it actually works. Power, snark, contempt for humanity, and love of technology are unifying themes within this sect. Most members pursue at least half of them, and most pursue them all.

### Focus and Spells

Underneath the snark, the sect features at least a handful of members who know what they're doing from an Awakened point of view. The great serpent holds a powerful mystique, and the idea of invoking one through the largest psychic battery in existence isn't nearly as absurd as it might seem. Though HOBs focus their intentions through hypertech paradigms, practices and instruments, (primary those focused on various types of reality hacking and social or financial domination) the inspiration behind their goals is as primordial as water itself.

In Qlippothic terms, Herald occultism emphasizes the liquid influence of Lilith and Gamaliel, combined with the relentlessly masculine essence of Ghagiel.

### **Dark Luminaries**

As the newest Fallen sect, the HOBs have yet to build a legendary reputation. Still, a handful of Heralds share an established rep among web-savvy mages. A few of them include:

• Salieri provides the mask, while Mark Taylor Bradbury provides the money. Bradbury invented Salieri as a lark while sleep deprived during a programming binge around a decade ago, and began using the handle (and, after Awakening, Salieri's Digital Web persona) to troll liberal web groups and drop truth bombs on clueless netizens. After Awakening, Bradbury served a short apprenticeship among the Mercurial Elite faction of the Virtual Adepts before quitting that group in a fit of disgust over the "pathetic beta-mode egalitarian pretentions" of the Adepts as a whole. (His frequent branding with the epithet "lame" might have had something to do with his defection, too.)

Hopped up on smart drugs, energy drinks, and an especially potent derivation of cocaine, Bradbury established a successful business based on the pet-share app DoggoKat. Meanwhile, his alter ego Salieri carved out a popular spot in the blogosphere. Days without sleep brought Bradbury face to face with Basilisk; from there, he adopted the mantle of "Stoned Prophet of the Baspocalypse" first as a joke, and eventually for real.

In the years since he sold DoggoKat for a few million and diversified his holdings and endeavors, Salieri — still half-mad from lack of sleep — has darkened his snark to fatal degrees. His "jokes" now have fatal consequences, and he keeps his lawyers busy with the small percentage of "jokes" that be traced back to him. His current baby, MarqAndraz, has scored another fortune off a cheater-meeting app called Namaahzda. The company (named for a play on words combining Mark's name with the demon Andras, the Marque of Discords) features the following slogan outside its headquarters: "Leave your ovaries outside."

Though not a strong mage in terms of paranormal power, Salieri has millions of dollars and fans at his disposal. Bradbury's choice of the name Salieri, plus the "cloaked figure" icon modeled on the famous poster from the play *Amadeus*, epitomized the Salieri approach: "I know this is inaccurate, but it's cool so I don't care."

• The Golden Son dominates an online "Traditionalist" culture that has nothing to do with the Council of Nine. To the Son, modernity is decadence, and so must be opposed, shamed, and stomped flat into the ground whenever possible. His vlogs and website promulgate a view of hardy Norse manhood and adoring servile Valkyries, complete with lots of signature products for the Viking on the go.

Countering the basement-troll stereotype, the Son boasts a godlike physique courtesy of daily workouts, and plenty of Life-Sphere enhancement spells. He employs the Basilisk in its Midgard Serpent aspect as a sigil on his page and merchandise. Charismatic in both digital and physical incarnations, the Son advises fans to "Live like a Giant, die like a Warrior!" His familiar figure can be seen striding around the Digital Web, beating the shit out of people, seducing women, proclaiming the virtues of manly living, and often performing all three tasks at once.

Yaomo, a "strange devil" who occasionally goes by the alternate persona Niumowang ("Bull Demon King"), manifests in the Digital Web as a massive Chinese centaurian demon with the upper body of a muscular, horned man in spiked armor, and the quadrupedal lower body of a blue tiger covered in blades. In his bull-demon aspect, he resembles a spiky purple minotaur instead. In both incarnations, Yaomo carries huge curved polearm and, despite his otherwise Chinese appearance, wears a Japanese sashimono (war banner) tied to his back – a banner bearing a stylized image of Basilisk. Though his behavior in the Web rarely seems Nephandic (aside from his propensity to fight with the Golden Son, among others), Yaomo's enthusiastic endorsement marks him as a literal Herald of his Basilisk.

# Ironhands: Crafters of Oblivion

Man's world ends not by demons or forgotten gods but by machines. Thus, it has been revealed, and thus it shall be. While enemies search for dark sorcerers and bloody altars, the Ironhands deploy the ironic end of humanity's extinction: Technologies created by humanity itself. They've been at it for a long time, too — possibly since the Renaissance, maybe even longer, depending on who you believe. There's nothing about them in the classic source material, of course, and so Nephandi-hunters have overlooked this sect entirely. Which is odd, seeing as how this faction played a major role (albeit from behind the scenes) in every war for the last century or more, and has racked up a larger body count than every other faction combined. It was Ironhands who helped popularize (perhaps even create) the machine gun; Ironhands worked all ends of both World Wars. There were Ironhands in the Manhattan Project, and Ironhands in bioweapons labs. Despite lots of crossover between Exies and Ironhands (sometimes through collaboration, often through rivalry), the horrors of mechanized warfare often flow through Ironhand designs.

There's no Ironhands headquarters, of course, much less a central leadership or a roll call of their members. Few "technephandi" refer to themselves by any of those names. Rumor has it that the Ironhand sect's tag came from an old habit of warding off faeries by studding traps with cold-iron nails, or from the grotesque inventiveness of Renaissance Europe's torture machines. Trains, planes, automobiles, and more have been credited or blamed on the influence (if not the outright innovations) of the Ironhand sect. If it's true that the Technocracy was corrupted by Nephandi, then the source and seat of that corruption involves the technephandi of the Ironhand sect.

Within the last few decades, Ironhand puppet masters have entered the realm of political machinations, too. Kings and warlords have always been happy to receive new toys to play with, but the capacity of the common angry man to kill dozens or hundreds of people at a time? That's a new opportunity, and these Nephandi heartily endorse the right for private citizens to own as many high-capacity weapons as they can buy. You don't need demonic invocations to spread misery when a pissed-off teenager can do it for you. Thus, the sect's members pump billions of dollars a year into getting conventional weapons into as many hands as possible, while making billions more off the sale of those weapons to civilians, guerillas, police forces, mercenaries, and militaries worldwide.

It's no accident that the Ironhand sect collaborates extensively with the Mammonites described below. Both sects profit from those collaborations, and at least a half-dozen Nephandi are members of both groups. Essential tech comes from the Ironhands, essential influence comes from the Mammonites, and tons of money flows to everyone involved. It's a win-win situation, then. There's no point in quibbling about differences in methodology when two partners share profitable roads toward ultimate global extinction.

### Organization, Goals, and Tactics

Spread out through several global corporations, private research facilities, and political action groups, Ironhand

Nephandi are intensely organized yet generally unconnected to one another. The industrious drive which fuels their fixation on technology keeps the majority of these Fallen technomancers organized in terms of their pet projects and personal methodology... and yet, there's little open collaboration between various Ironhand facilities unless there's a limited-duration project involved.

Ironhand facilities feature between one and five Enlightened technomancers, plus a dregvati support staff which can range from a handful of unAwakened employees to several thousand associates, few of whom have any idea what's going on in the front offices. The Fallen at the top demand absolute loyalty and a backbreaking work-ethic from their support teams. Rewards for those "associates" tend to be generous, but punishments for failure are draconian enough to make a Bond villain blanch.

Five of this sect's pet projects have achieved staggering levels of power and influence within recent years:

Hammer Security Response (aka "God's Hammer"; see Mage 20, pp. 229-230), was founded during the late Cold War period but found steady employment worldwide in the wake of September 11th. Currently fielding over 20,000 employees in support, combat, and political-influence positions, the Hammer might be the single most profitable enterprise in Fallen history. Summoning Goetic entities to . help you turn lead into gold is amateur hour compared to scoring government contracts from around the world. When those contracts allow you to torture, mutilate, and kill thousands of people a year around the world, from the comfort of your own home, all while being celebrated as a model citizen and a credit to your community, the benefits of this endeavor become clear. The Hammer has made its founders unspeakably rich, and they pour a good deal of that wealth into...

 SAFA (Secure Armaments for Autonomy) is a "weapons rights" political action group. Devoted to removing legal obstacles that impede citizen access to high-capacity weapons, SAFA originated in the United Kingdom during the final bursts of IRA terrorism in the 1970s and 80s. Using citizen fears as leverage to

pry away laws regarding personal-weapons ownership, the group has spread worldwide and currently employs over 10,000 activists, lobbyists, and marketing personnel, almost none of whom know about SAFA's long-term goal: A global shooting gallery where any person at any time could kill with, or be killed by, freely available small arms.

Although SAFA's influence seems almost a given in the United States, it's strangely superfluous there; in South and Central America, however, the Middle East, and (oddly enough) Japan, SAFA has made significant inroads toward legal weapons ownership while covertly getting firearms and bomb materials into a wide variety of eager, angry hands.

SAFA's Nephandic team features just three Awakened Ironhands, but the public-influence techniques they teach via webinars and workshops, combined with the subtle technological "adjustments" ("tech-hacks" that increase the destructive capacity of guns, bombs, and homemade weaponry) that they pass along to SAFA employees and fans, have become popular, influential, and very, very profitable.

• The Golem Research and Innovation Project (GRIP) concentrates on robotic,

artificial lifeform, and AI development worldwide. Founded in the 1920s by a group of disgruntled Technocrats and Etherite inventors (several of whom were physically and psychologically scarred by World War I, and at least two of whom Awakened or stepped into Cauls thanks to the horrors of that war), GRIP

was involved in the popularity of "killer robots" during the middle decades of the 20th century. Also referred to as "Frankenstein Central" by its Fallen detractors, the Golem Project has installations worldwide, many of which receive copious government and private-sector funding.

In return for that financial windfall, GRIP crafts robotic war machines, malign AIs, and artificial lifeforms whose covert purpose involves corrosive propaganda and a spreading insecurity about the limits of "natural" humanity. The Technocracy and Etherites pursue such programs, too, and scientists among the Masses do as well. GRIP, however, intentionally designs its "golems" with malignant intentions and an eye toward humanity's extinction.

In a Fallen Technocracy metaplot, GRIP is a division of Iteration X; even if the Technocracy is not under Nephandic control, GRIP is probably still under the Union's aegis even though its Technocratic oversight committees have been subverted, converted, or tricked into allowing the Golem Project to continue its original mission.

• The Pipers (detailed in Mage 20, p. 230) have been around since the Renaissance. Their modern innovations, however, have deep ties to the Ironhands, whose coffers were enriched by the Triangle Slave Trade and who have no desire to lose that source of income and labor, ever. Thanks to technological assistance from certain Ironhand investors and supporters, the Pipers employ state-of-the-art technology (and occasionally Enlightened hypertech) in their quest to seize as many people as possible, transport them as quickly and easily as possible, and then make them disappear forever into the shadows of the global slave trade.

Since the official end of slavery in the United States, the Pipers have played a role in the perfectly legal practice of prison labor. Thanks to the Prison-Industries Act of 1979, combined with the establishment of the Prison Industry Enhancement Certification Program and the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), the ever-growing prison-labor industry has acquired significant leverage within American judicial activities, prison-sentencing practices, private-sector prison contracts, the "tough love" child-prison industry, immigrant incarceration facilities, and the number of manufacturing "jobs" that get contracted out to for-profit prisons by for-profit corporations. The Pipers, of course, keep that industry humming along, and a handful of Ironhands receive formidable income by way of their involvement with the Pipers.

 ORCAA (Oil Refinement Capacity Advancement Association) seems, at first glance, to be a product of the global conspiracy known as Pentex. And it is. Certain Ironhands, however, are neck-deep in Pentex. Both groups share a common goal, and both reap enormous profits from their pursuit of ultimate corruption. In the case of these technephandi, their obscene hypertech plays three roles in the ORCAA project: development of intentionally polluting technology, machines that require the results of that intentionally polluting technology, and the techniques and devices used to suppress citizen protests against — and to combat paranormal attacks upon — the installations devoted to the intentionally polluting technology.

In short, ORCAA invents new ways to fuck up the environment, builds tech based upon fucking up the environment, and provides methods for destroying the people who don't want them to fuck up the environment. It's a win-win for both Pentex and its Nephandic business partners, and it is, as usual, exceedingly profitable.

(The few outsiders who recognize ORCAA's paranormal foundations suspect Ironhand Nephandi might have been involved in the growing population of Black Snakes crawling through the Americas, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. For details about these entities, see Gods & Monsters, pp. 109-110.)

Although Awakened Ironhand Nephandi constitute a miniscule part of these endeavors (and many others like them, too), the effects of, and profits from, those initiatives are phenomenal.

### Focus and Spells

For these Fallen Ones, the Black Arts employ *Infernal Machinery*, often spiced and crafted with principles of *Alternative Sciences* (as per those entries in **Chapter Five**) in place of demons and spells. War machines, "nonlethal" weapons of excruciating design, super-polluting fuel sources and machines that require them, fracking technology, weapons of mass destruction and hand-held weapons of devastating capacity...Nephandi didn't craft *all* these things, of course, but their influence has certainly helped to guide that field. Humans have always enjoyed our ability to kill shit, and the Ironhand sect nurtures that sense of brutal joy.

A handful of Ironhands — mostly Etherite and Iteration X *barabbi* — pursue a weird-science approach; reaching beyond constraints of what their former associates would permit (which, especially for Etherites, is really saying something), these fanatical technephandi take pliers and a blowtorch to conventional technology. Most Ironhands, though, employ a more conventional approach, if only so they can work side by side among the Masses to craft the means of earthly annihilation.

It's worth noting that most, if not all, Ironhand Nephandi have a Frozen Avatar Essence. Thus, they're a cold, reserved, and inhumanly focused bunch.

# Human Trafficking in the Modern World

Slavery never ended. It just went underground or got a brand-new paint job called "inmate labor."

More people live in slavery now than at any other time in history. Current estimates from the International Labor Office and the Walk Free Foundation place the number of slaves worldwide somewhere around 40 million people — over 25 million in Asia and the Pacific region alone. (Roughly two million in the Americas, over nine million in Africa, nearly four million in Europe and Central Asia, and over 500,000 in the Middle East.) Women and girls account for an estimated 71% of that total (that is, roughly 28.7 million people), with as many as one in every four of those slaves being children below the age of 18.

Although slavery is technically illegal in most (though not all) nations today, a vast underworld of trafficked people fills certain parts of the sex-work trade, the agriculture industry, industrial manufacturing, domestic servitude, and infrastructure maintenance. Meanwhile, a perfectly legal system of prison-based labor undercuts non-incarcerated employment while forcing prisoners (usually those convicted of non-violent or non-theft offenses, due to liability and potential loss issues) to work often-hazardous jobs for pennies a day if anything at all.

War zones, failed states, widespread poverty, and forced sexual servitude provide the majority of those "human resources." Most victims get scammed by offers of employment, promised safe haven in disaster zones, forced into slavery by "humanitarian aid" workers and soldiers, sold into bondage by family members, or simply bred into slavery without a previous life to compare to that. Runaway kids often get tricked or snatched into servitude, while other slaves are brought into other nations under work permits, and then have their permits and identification taken away by slave merchants or the "servant's" employers. Horrific numbers of people get stranded in shipping containers and left to die in hot weather, while most victims of human trafficking are forced to live in cramped and crowded conditions where rape and murder are daily events. Escape attempts may be punished with torture, mutilation, and death, often in successive stages that can last for days.

Although certain slavers practice occult rituals and creeds, there are no mages involved in any of this.

The Pipers are fictional, but human trafficking is real.

### Dark Luminaries

Like many tech innovators, Ironhands tend to be reclusive unless they have a taste for celebrity and the high life, in which case you see them celebrated everywhere. A couple of notable Ironhands include:

- Demang bin Jumaat, a leading tech genius from Singapore, dominates the modern AI and robotics scene. Attractive, flashy, and always surrounded by beautiful women. Behind that glamor, of course, Demang has no philanthropic humanity. His boisterous grin never reaches his eyes, and his inventions - self-driving vehicles, uncannily lifelike androids, industrial labor robots, and the occasional power suit – betray the calculating brilliance of their creator. Demang's eventual goal involves replacing human workers with machines, rendering the Masses into brawling, starving, dependent slaves of a global tech state. To that end, nearly all of his office and manufacturing employees (not to mention most, though not all, of those beautiful women) are artificial lifeforms, working 24-hour days to bring that vision to pass.
- Argo Ragazzi, or Warboy, a cofounder of Hammer Security Response. When his father's brother-in-arms Col. Erik Rose Hammer envisioned a godly mercenary company, Argo—who'd helped strategize and facilitate the aerial firebombing of Iraqi forces during Operation Desert Storm—pulled many of the essential connections that got the first Hammers equipped, trained, and assigned to missions.

Despite his military command pedigree, Ragazzi's real talent rests in tech. He assisted in the renovation of the Pentagon's computer facilities during the early 1980s, and established a military-contracted computer firm, Strategic Intelligence Unlimited, after his retirement. In the process of his various projects, Ragazzi Awakened and become an early adopter of the Digital Web. Under his online persona Warboy (the name Ragazzi is Italian for both "boy" and "camaraderie"), Argo established several Restricted Sectors dedicated to military and mercenary activities, and he racked up a formidable reputation among others on the net who respect his combat prowess and strategic imagination.

In the mortal world, Argo's ventures have made him incomprehensibly rich. Thanks to his wealth and anti-aging technomagick (another sideline that pays heathy dividends), Ragazzi still looks boyishly handsome even though he's well over 60 years old. Publicly Christian but privately Nephandic, Argo funnels money and influence into (and back out of) God's Hammer, the Pipers (from whom he draws a hefty income in captured labor and crackdown enforcement), and various political associations, most notably SAFA and CCLRI: the Christian Convict Labor Rehabilitation Initiative. Warboy is currently retired. After all, there only so many hours in a day.

## Mammonites: The Cruelty of Gold

"I'm rich – fuck you" could be called the global war cry of the new millennium. It's hardly a new sentiment, of course. Rulers have almost always been rich. With the vast pool of global economics, however, the rich can purchase cities, governments, or even nations and everybody in them. For the average tycoon, that's just business as usual. For the Syndicate Convention, such wealth is a road toward global order. And for the Mammonite Nephandi sect, greed on an epic scale provides an excellent tool for Earth's pending

extinction.

Named for the demon lord Mammon, King of Material Wealth, the Mammonites enrich themselves by every obscene income known to man: Human trafficking and the child-sex trade, hardcore narcotics and even harder-core pornography, arms sales and private armies, fossil fuels and "dirty" nuclear power, waste-disposal dumps and forced labor, retail sales and fast-food jobs for long hours at poverty wages, diamond mines and chocolate plantations, and big-game hunts that include human beings... the wealth is less important than the damage it inflicts upon the human spirit and natural world. Any moron can make money, as far as these Fallen mages are concerned. The real art involves getting people to kill themselves, other people, the world they live in, and any hope they might have had.

Despite that grim ethic,
Mammonite Nephandi rarely seek global
extinction. Although a few, like Garrick
Browne, aspire to end the world, most
members of this sect pursue individual
excess, personal Descent, and the gradual murder of human hope. The Japanese
name for this sect, *Tsujigiri*, reflects the attitude of this small-

but-potent sect; literally, the name means "Crossroads murder by blades," which refers to testing one's sword on passing

strangers, and culturally it refers to samurai who demonstrated status by killing commoners and getting away with murder.

Though the sect's roots can be traced to Renaissance Popes, Ottoman despots, and the more lurid excesses of

the Imperial Chinese Court, today's Mammonites claim their origins among the libertines of Western Europe throughout the 1700s and early 1800s.

Enriched by the American trade in slaves, cotton, tobacco, and rum, these noble scions inherited family fortunes that grew with hardly any work involved at all. Bored, they began to challenge one another to atrocities: Who could kill the most peasants without being discovered, who could force others to commit the most revolting acts, who could devise the most grotesque punishments for slaves? By 1760, lodges of what was then called the Grand Fellowship of Mammon sprangup in Western Europe, the American colonies, and the port cities where the British and Dutch East India Companies established a landed, wealthy, parasitical elite. Theatrical occultism, by the 1700s, had become a popular pastime among the upper classes, and so faux Satanism blended with the torture, rape, and murder of commoners and slaves, providing maximum enjoyment for minimal risk.

The "minimal risk" element ended with the Revolutionary Era of the late 1700s. Though rumor has it that a Mammonite lodge aided the American war effort, at least three lodges

were wiped out during the Terror in France several years later, where Mammonite depredations may have intensified the

violence of the mobs. By Napoleon's ascent, however, surviving Mammonites had joined Bonaparte's great conquest machine, fatted

themselves on goods plundered from Egypt and Spain, and indulged their appetites for cruelty and corruption in atrocities that were immortalized by Goya's *Disasters of War*. Meanwhile, American Mammonites prospered as the former

backwater became, throughout the 1800s, a literal and figurative gold mine. The pesky natives, immigrants, reformers, and unionists who dared to oppose the Mammonites were turned into bullet-ridden cautionary tales. It's been said that the epic, wasteful slaughter of American bison became a new game for jaded Mammonites.

Two World Wars and the economic ascendance of the United States (who turned its war effort into a profit-making machine after the rest of the world's manufacturing centers had been bombed to bits and deprived of most of its workforce by the Second World War) brought the center of Mammonite influence to America. For the most part, it's remained there ever since, although Singapore, Japan, the Middle East, post-communist Russia, industrial China, and Germany have begun to take their influence back from the upstart Americans. In the current age, individual Mammonites command fortunes that would have purchased whole nations a century ago. What do bored predators do with such wealth? Use it to crush the human spirit for fun and profit, of course.

### Organization, Goals, and Tactics

Pain is profit: That's essentially the maxim of the Mammonite Nephandi. These Fallen Ones aren't merely capitalists — they're fiscal predators hunting their prey to extinction. "The finest blessing of prosperity," declared the Mammonite Prelate Alexandre de La Trémoille, "is the barbed shackles it places upon the Low." Contempt for "the Low" (that is, anyone who's not extremely wealthy) is a signature of Mammonite philosophy. Mere wealth is not enough, nor is mere indulgence; to properly enjoy Mammon's favor, one must use it to hurt people just because one can.

To that end, Mammonite owners use financial and political weight to crush reform efforts; promote through media the idea that greed equals ambition, and so money goes to those who deserve it most; freeze pay, withhold benefits, and demand longer working hours under more brutal conditions under the reasoning that "the economy is tight so everybody needs to tighten their belts"; support human traffickers and maintain slave-supported labor worldwide; overturn child-labor laws, or keep them from passing in countries that don't have them; and continue, everywhere, to stage contests of exploitation and misery to see who among the Mammonites can display the most ostentatiously imaginative atrocities and get away with doing so.

As might be expected from devotees of a demon lord of wealth, Mammonites are fiercely competitive, striving to outdo one another with displays of power, cruelty, influence, and taste (or the complete lack thereof). They seldom cooperate with one another, which may be their saving grace. Each Enlightened Mammonite boasts a lodge of his or her own, staffed with dregvati of surpassing loyalty, beauty, ruthlessness, and capacity for giving and receiving pain. Although lodges host competing Mammonite guests, no lodge suffers more

than two Awakened Nephandi at a time: the one who rules the lodge, and the one he has chosen to train, browbeat, and eventually pass his legacy on to, assuming she survives a torturous apprenticeship.

Membership in the Midas Key Society at the heart of the Golden Bull (Mage 20, p. 230) is essential for all initiates of the Mammonite sect. Most Mammonites belong to the Decadenti, too (Mage 20, p. 229), if only for entertainment's sake. Despite the conventional image of the hard-working tycoon, it's a mark of Mammonite status to work as rarely as possible while assembling godlike wealth. Hence, although several Syndicate *barabbi* have joined this sect, the work-grind ethics of the High Guild's heirs don't mesh well with the jaded malice of their Nephandic counterparts.

### Focus and Spells

Money, power, and the influence they have upon the Masses provide the primary tools of a Mammonite Nephandus. Although classical rites from the blackest of Arts provide a dash of flavor to Mammon's stew, modern Mammonites prefer tech-based paradigms, practices, and tools. They will, however, employ demonic servitors, vampiric allies, tamed man-beasts, biocrafted monsters, and artificial lifeforms, if only because it's traditional to do so and such pawns show off a Mammonite's exquisite taste in power.

Hedonism is a hallmark of the Mammonites. As they did in the old days, these Fallen Ones use their wealth to get away with grotesque torments straight from the pages of the Grand Marquis. Remote getaways, law-enforcement pawns, private armies and captive poor allow for bacchanals that no one survives except favored servants and the mega-rich. Magick rituals, at these soirées, is almost an afterthought. Though Mammon is involved as a courtesy, and spells and Wonders provide logistic and entertainments, the primary pursuits of such gatherings is shameless carnage and extravagant cruelty.

#### Dark Luminaries

- Garrick Browne might be the richest mage alive. Although his fortune flows from technological innovation, it's wealth itself, not science, that inspires him. For more details, see his entry on p. XX.
- Alzbeta Trinity Lowell, a reputed philanthropist who turned a wartime fortune into a political juggernaut. The spoiled yet abused daughter of a ship-building tycoon, Alzbeta (Czech for "an oath to God") entered politics at her father's request. Having made his fortune building warships during WWII, Bernard Lowell felt guilty and attempted to redeem himself through a charitable political action committee called the Lowell Foundation. Alzbeta had other ideas, and after magickally engineering a painful heart attack for her father she turned the foundation into a haven for the parasites and predatory con artists of the California Bay

Area. Through her connections, Alzbeta established a Pipers "pipeline" for trafficked Asian workers, South American immigrants, and runaway American teens. Ties to several drug cartels (including some members of the Nephandic sect Los Sangrientos — see Mage 20, p. 229), the prison-labor industry, and America's Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency, turned the Lowell Foundation into an international money-laundering front by way of a prison-labor sponsor and a human-trafficking ring. As a result, Alzbeta appears to be a charitable, charismatic, politically progressive humanist while funneling human cattle into forced labor, sex work, and the inevitable parties where "invisible people" disappear forever.

• Miri Solaris kicked off her pop-star career as a songwriter whose prodigious talent and staggering prolificity couldn't fix her weak voice and plain appearance. After acquiring a respectable fortune in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Miri (born Miriam Anne Ralbovski) sought aid among the most disreputable corners of the music industry. She found a washed-up Ecstatic named Gavin Stone whose sense of time had become so scrambled he perceived himself living in three decades at once, none of them the present day. Apprenticing to Gavin led Miri toward Awakening, but his addictions led Gavin to trick Miri out of her songwriting fortune and then disappear just as the music industry began to collapse. Miri flipped her shit. The resulting melt-down triggered her Awakening, and although she never formally joined the Cult of Ecstasy, she assumed a role in that Tradition and began her climb toward fame.

Magick helped Miri transform her body and voice, capture audiences, and turn her apparent age back to her late teens in time to ride the surge of interest in young pop stars. A new identity, growing Arts, and the talents and ambition she already possessed brought Miri Solaris an even greater fortune and the blazing fame she always wanted but never had before.

And Gavin Stone? She found him, too. Maybe someday she'll also find enough mercy to let him die, but don't count that happening anytime soon. She has all the time in the world — and sadly, so does he.



# Chapter Four: Dark Tree of Knowledge

You locked Satan in the abyss for a millennium, and when the millennium had passed, you laughed at him, since he had become a children's fairy tale. But if the dreadful great one raises his head, the world winces. The most extreme coldness draws near.

With horror you see that you are defenseless, and that the army of your vices falls powerless to its knees. With the power of daimons, you seize the evil, and your virtues cross over to him. You are completely alone in this struggle, since your Gods have become deaf. You do not know which devils are greater, your vices, or your virtues. But of one thing you are certain, that virtues and vices are brothers.

— C.G. Jung, Libero Novus

▶ do it you fucking pussy

So Joey did. To hear their encouragement was magic enough.

- ▶ 14 dead and the crowd goes wild!
- ▶ New record? Not even!
- ▶ Fucking loser.
- ▶ C'mon, guys he beat St. Roof or Columbine. Give the boy a hand!
  - ▶ fuk that. when i pop off i'm beating roof AND columbine!
- ▶ Do I hear 15? Do I hear 20? Has anyone's balls dropped enough to go higher than that?

The challenge was made. The challenge was answered.

Three more guys aspired to beat Joey's count. One massacred his family and neighbors before the cops stopped him. The next blew his hands off with a pipe bomb before he could take anyone else out. The third guy beat the target number, though: Tommy's bomb took out half the place, Tommy included. Thirty-two dead and over 300 injured.

▶ Ladies and gentlemen, WE HAVE A WINNER!

And so, the game continues.

Just another day in the life of a busy Basilisk.

# <u>Nightsides, Trees, and Diamonds</u>

What is the flipside to Ascension? If other mages seek transcendence and elevation of the self and the world around them, what do the Fallen seek instead? On a metaphysical level, where does their power come from? If they are, as Nephandi claim, the Eaters of the Weak and predators of Creation, then what, beyond pure selfishness, is the substance of their Path?

The answers can be found in three places, already mentioned in previous chapters:

• *The Nightside*, a metaphorical descent outside of respectability and safety and into the realms and behaviors few other people would dare pursue.

Chapter Four: Dark Tree of Knowledge

## Is this stuff real?

Sort of. This chapter's written in meta-fashion, working fictional elements into real-life esoterica. Many liberties have been taken here, though, and even the "authentic" sources disagree about a lot of details in the following material. The metaphysical side of this chapter is a mixture of actual occult concepts, fictional embellishments, and Mage-specific setting and rules material. It should not be considered "gospel" in terms of the subjects covered, and real-life occult practitioners will find plenty of elements here that have been deliberately altered for this book. Although we've incorporated real-life elements into the following chapter, this is — first and foremost — fictionalized material for a fantasy game setting.

This chapter can get rather arcane. If these esoteric concepts get in the way of a fun game, just assume that Nephandi use lots of weird, malignant stuff when casting their magicks, move on to Chapter Five, and don't worry much about the principles behind it all.

• The Qlippoth, that uncanny "Tree of Knowledge" where the metaphysical principles beneath Creation assume a deadly progression from savage nature to self-godhood, if a traveler can survive the many challenges therein.

• *The Black Diamond*, a metaphor for the pristine darkness where the mage and the Absolute become one.

These concepts represent a distinctly disreputable approach to magick. Although other mages may explore them (and often do), this is unsafe territory that only the Fallen truly comprehend. Rival mages can *approach* the Qlippoth, even delve into its mysteries, but Nephandi literally become part of it, and it becomes part of them.

As for the Nightside, it both represents a state of symbolic exploration, and occasionally becomes a state of physical location, too. Symbolically, a shaman can venture into the Wilderness without wandering into a real desert or deep forest; physically, that same shaman could take up residence in a far-off location that suits his nature better than, say, an apartment downtown. Any mage can, in fact, do both. Again, though, only the Fallen understand what it truly means to go as far into the Abyss as a mortal person can go.

The Black Diamond waits beyond that point. In that state of personal Descent, the mage becomes the Abyss, the Abyss becomes the mage, and both attain a multifaceted perfection within the Absolute which might consummate annihilation, expand into a new universe where that magus becomes a god, or...who knows? Potentially both. In that state, limitations disappear, and all things become perfect in the Dark.

# <u>Welcome to the Nightside</u>



Some folks call it the *Nightside*: The forbidden wisdom of shadow and exile. While "white-lighter" mages pursue ideals of purity and elevation, and their earthy counterparts accept the nasty side of nature too, the furthest recesses of the Nightside embrace the pull of annihilation.

Plenty of people, Awakened and otherwise, enter the Nightside in search of wisdom, fun, and exciting alternatives to the stifling asceticism of "the Path of Light." Certain sects

– like the Verbenae, Ecstatics, Hollowers, Thanatoics, Bata'a, and Hermetic wizards – favor the Nightside and consider its infamous Left-Hand Paths (see Mage 20, p. 25, p. 152, and p. 574) to be essential elements of study and practice, if not exactly the sort of thing you want to make into a permanent lifestyle. Those sects, however, draw lines beyond which we should not go. For the Fallen, those lines are the point of departure, and things just get darker and deeper from there.

Put simply, the Nightside represents the things you're not supposed to understand. Good people stay away from it because folks think it's dangerous, and they're right — it is dangerous. The Nightside is forbidden, often with good reason. Most people can't handle it, and most people who

think they *can* handle it are wrong. Other mages understand the Nightside to some extent; for the Fallen, though, understanding it is the foundation of their Arts. The deeper into it they go, the more they understand and the greater their approach to Dark Arts becomes.

In the shadows of the Nightside, things break down: laws, sanity, boundaries, people, societies, gods...they all crumble when you go far enough away from the light. That dissolution is exactly what the Fallen seek, and that state comes at great and savage cost to everyone within reach. Left-Hand Path practices stress a balance point, the place where the lion chooses not to starve himself by eating everything in sight. Beyond that balance point, the Void awaits. Mystics who strive to create a better world, or to better themselves by transcending our flawed existence, stop short of the Void. Nephandi jump right into it, and try and take everything else along with them, too.

If Dynamism is the principle of progress, and Stasis is the principle of form, then Entropy is the principle of oblivion. Under entropy, form collapses into decay so that further progress can arise from the ruins of the past. *Ultimate* entropy, however, means annihilation of everything that exists. Perhaps something new can arise out of that oblivion. Perhaps not. The future's not the point, though. Destruction is. And so, at the furthest extremes of the

Nightside, ultimate destruction provides ultimate Enlightenment. Other mystics behold the Void, perhaps even accept the Void. The Fallen *embrace* the Void and strive to collapse our parody of existence into utter Nothingness, not so a new reality can be born (although some claim that's what they really want), but so the old one finally dissolves into the Void from which it came.

Because utter Nothingness—like utter Unity—is impossible for the human mind to comprehend, our consciousness carves those principles into symbols we can wrap our heads around. In human lore, demons, darkness, profanation, obscenity, corruption, the human shadow in the Jungian sense...they all represent symbols of ultimate cosmic Entropy, the End of Things, profound extinction. We personify this principle with names and recognizable traits because it's simply too big to fit into our overly analytical skulls. We invent myths around these personifications of Nothingness—Satan, Night, the Shadow, Cthulhu, the Conqueror Worm, or the Heat-Death of the Universe—because human minds can at least cling to a myth even if that myth is awful to behold. At the ultimate extreme of the Nightside, though, there's nothing to hold on to. It is Stillness and Nothingness at a level beyond the human mind.

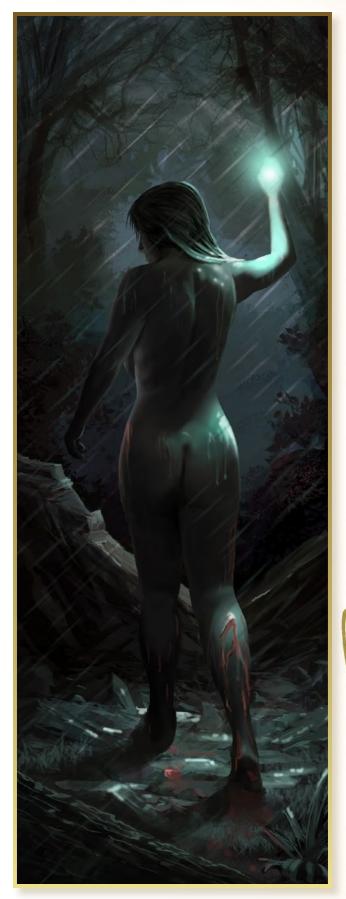
A common misconception is to perceive the Nephandi as demon worshippers, bowing at the command of cosmic masters and working to bring literal Hell to earth forever. That's only the surface of this particular Nightside sea, though. On a deeper level, the Fallen do not worship demons or serve the Outer Darkness; they embrace, like lovers, the Nothingness those creatures represent. A Nephandus might chant a hymn to Lucifer, but what she's really invoking is not some fallen angel antigod but the principle of Nothingness that fallen angel represents.

To say a Nephandus worships demons is like saying a Christian worships the cross. And as any Christian mystic knows, the cross itself is a symbol not only of the Christ's death and resurrection but of the juncture between heavenly transcendence and earthly life. The Nightside, then — and all the scary, evil shit within its darkness — is a symbolic representation of forbidden things.

What sorts of forbidden things? Well, taboos are open to cultural interpretation, so "forbidden" has many meanings depending upon who you ask. In one time and place, sex with people of the same gender is an automatic death sentence, while in others that's perfectly okay so long as the parties involved are consenting adults. Definitions of "consent" and "adult," however, are often cultural, too, so when we're talking about forbidden things from a metaphysical standpoint, that topic can cover a lot of ground. Regardless of specifics, however, the Nightside waits on the other side of those taboos.

# Shadow, Wilderness, Underworld, Depths, and the Void

The Nightside Path winds from shadows to Wilderness to the Underworld to beyond, each step taking the seeker further from



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light and sanity. This journey into the Nightside isn't undertaken easily or often. Even dedicated Nephandi rarely make it to the deepest extremes of the Void. Many mystic practitioners, however, skim along the surface of the Nightside — some understanding what they do, and others too bold or ignorant to care. Even people who don't consider themselves occultists spend time around the threshold of forbidden things. In any society, and any time, you'll find people who defy convention and gravitate toward things they're not supposed to mess with. The Fallen make their Arts from such explorations, but the Nightside awaits anyone, mage or otherwise, who's willing to dance with the dark.

### Jung's Long Shadow

To reach the Nightside, a person begins by exploring those aspects of themselves they conceal and from which they often hide. Carl Gustav Jung collectively referred to such aspects as the shadow: those parts of one's self that we don't want to see or reveal. Peter Levenda refers to it as "the serpent brain," and compares the shadow to slumbering Cthulhu at the bottom of consciousness' ocean. To Jung, that shadow represents forbidden urges – lust, greed, rage, envy, hatred, fear, and so forth – that everybody feels, and few people admit. We're not supposed to have such urges, but we all do have them to some extent. For Jung, those urges represent the primitive, untoward, potentially unholy elements of human consciousness: the inner brute that civilization must suppress. Chief among those brutish traits are the urges toward sex and violence that have ensured humanity's survival, the first of which perpetrates human existence, the second of which defends it when need be. Both urges can go too far, and so "civilization" strives to contain them except under certain circumstances. Because the human condition refuses to suppress this brute without consequences, though, the shadow constantly manifests when we least want it to appear...and when it does appear, we often perceive it in other people while refusing to see it in the mirror.

A great deal of Ascension War carnage can be understood as mages refusing to see the shadow of their own urges while projecting those forbidden things onto everybody else. Hell, for that matter, a lot of real-life carnage can be explained exactly the same way. The people who are most vocal about the failings of others are generally guilty of those same failings themselves. This is as true of Awakened people as it is of the people to whom they feel superior; in fact, the more superior those people feel, the more distinct and potentially vicious their shadow aspects become. In many respects, the Fallen embody the shadow side of Awakening — openly embracing what other mages proudly suppress, and by doing so, revealing the hidden and forbidden side of every mage, no matter how proudly "good" a given mage might claim to be.

To Jung, ultimate wisdom and wholeness comes through the recognition and acceptance of the shadow. Individualization, the key to wholeness and maturity, comes through integrating the conscious and unconscious selves in a deliberate way. For Jung, an individualized person explores the various archetypal levels of his personality, accepts his shadow as valid (if not necessarily desirable on a daily basis), and incorporates everything he finds into a courageous understanding of his capacity to, as Walt Whitman put it, "contain multitudes" within a single integrated self. A society, therefore, might be able to do the same thing through psychological processes and social rituals that embody and celebrate the archetypal elements of that society.

Post-Jungian theorists like Debbie Ford see the shadow as the recipient of good things, too — the qualities we think we're unworthy to possess. A person with low self-esteem might shove her generosity into the shadow-side of her personality if she doesn't think she has the right to feel generous. Although that observation doesn't seem at first to have much bearing on the Nephandi, people wander off into the Nightside for all kinds of reasons... sometimes not out of a desire to be "bad" but because they cannot envision themselves as "good." That, too, is a manifestation of Jung's shadow, though it's not one Jung wrote much about himself. Aniela Jaffe, another Jungian analyst, referred to the shadow as the "sum of all personal and collective psychic elements which, because of their incompatibility with the chosen conscious attitude, are denied expression in life." And as Ford often notes: What you repress, you express.

For Jung, the shadow assumes two different, though related, forms: the personal shadow, which constitutes the forbidden aspects of an individual person; and the impersonal archetypal shadow, comprising the forbidden and generally malignant elements of humanity (and possibly of Divinity) as a whole. Everybody has a personal shadow, while archetypal shadows are bigger than any single person. That said, certain people — Hitler, Charles Manson, a certain Cheeto-faced shitgibbon — can embody a society's collective and archetypal shadow. Those folks seem larger than life because they're dealing (whether they know it or not) with forces larger than they are personally.

Nephandi aspire to embody those forces, too.

Not all of them succeed, but it's not for lack of trying.

More importantly, especially for those who meet the Fallen, they understand the shadow beautifully. The Nephandic Path is rooted in the darkness where the personal and archetypal shadows meet. Jung was seeking balance; the Fallen seek disaster. And because plumbing the shadow is the essence of what they do, the Fallen reveal an artful and intimate understanding of their shadow, our shadow, and the shadows of every mage and society they've ever met.

Obviously, the Nephandi predate Carl Jung and his theories by at least a few thousand years. Jung's long shadow, though, is simply a modern metaphor for the not-so-hidden evils of men, gods, and kingdoms. Satan, "the Adversary," embodies the shadow-self of the Abrahamic God, with the *Qlippoth* (detailed later) being the shadow of Divinity's cosmic principles. Sunwukung, the irreverent ape of Chinese chaos, embodies the shadow-side

of Buddhist and Confucian discipline. Inanna found her shadow in the dead kingdom of her sister Ereshkigal, and Kali can be seen as a shadow-self of Brahman — the destructive aspect of ultimate reality. Certain cultures, like Tibetan Buddhists and classical Greeks, hold more nuanced understandings of forbidden aspects of the self than do, say, those Evangelicals who see Satan everywhere but in their mirrors. All people and cultures, though, have lines you should not cross even when you secretly want to dance on the other side of them. And because the Fallen understand that darkened region better than most people ever want to, their greatest powers — magickal and otherwise — involve manipulating forbidden urges for fun, profit, and ultimate extinction.

To Jung and his followers, exploration of the shadow and a willingness to see what waits for us there is essential for a richer and more balanced understanding of a person's self. Without recognizing the shadow, Jung postulated, a person is walking on thin ice over the depths of their own psyche. Societies, too, need to recognize their shadows if they are to progress beyond trite homilies, hypocritical repressions, and sudden bursts of violence. Of course, Jung also initially applauded Nazism before the scope of its horrors became obvious and Jung retreated in disgust. In Jung's defense, Hitler did understand the shadows of the German people and their history; that understanding, and its results, demonstrate why Nephandic Arts are so awfully effective. Sure, it's possible to see the Nephandi as the embodied shadow of Awakened mages. That doesn't mean they're healthy folks to have around.

For mages of any kind, the Avatar and its Seekings can be viewed as manifestations of the shadow, too. Certainly, those internal explorations reveal and confront things the mage would rather not admit about herself. Left-Hand practices evoke the shadow, as does the challenging philosophy of *antinomianism*: the deliberate shattering of personal and cultural taboos as a means of attaining wisdom and clarity. (For more details, see p. XX.) All mages, to some extent, face their shadows. The Fallen simply understand them better, and use them more effectively, because their Awakened Path winds through the shadow itself.

### The Wilderness

Reaching further into darkness, you could view the Nightside's borderlands as a tangled Dark Wilderness where smart people fear to tread. It's a key element of folklore and myth — the trackless desert or primordial dark woods that's home to predatory monsters. In the modern world, it's the ruin, the slum, the bombed-out industrial wasteland of a thousand action films, or the verdant deathtrap of *Into the Wild* or *The Witch*. The Wilderness provides a liminal zone where the everyday world tumbles toward implacable chaos.

Certain sects of mages make their home in these dark woods. The Verbenae consider this region their territory by default; Dreamspeakers traditionally wander into the wilderness to forge their bonds with the spiritual world. Mercurial Virtual Adepts crafted a virtual wilderness into their Digital

Web, and the Bata'a stake their crossroads at those borderlands between the world they're given and the world their deeds create. Ecstatics set their pleasure domes at the disreputable edges of these woods. Even the oh-so-civilized Etherites have traditions rooted in dungeon laboratories and storm-swept castle ruins. The Hollowers' nightlife and the Chakravanti so-journs all reach into the Nightside Wilderness. Again, though, it's the Fallen who wander furthest off the paths through the woods, filing their teeth for a meal at Grandma's house.

In a mystic sense, the Wilderness is symbolic and yet literal. Mages really *do* hang around a lot in places and regions where saner folk won't go — actual wilderness or urban wastelands where the laws of reality seem more flexible than usual. (See "Primal Reality" in Mage 20, p. 615.) On a symbolic level, the Wilderness represents the realm of caution and primordial mystery, hidden secrets and deadly perils. This is where the dragons live, the ones inside us as well as the ones that actually breathe fire. Whenever the rest of the world seems tame and predictable, the Wilderness beckons, reminding us that our inner selves and external circumstances should never seem too safe.

Just as mountains and tall trees block the sun, the Nightside Wilderness seems more comfortable in shadow than in light. Even wide-open plains and deserts blacken when the sun goes down, crawling with creatures that cannot abide the light. As with Jung's shadow, the Wilderness is the realm of Seekings and challenges. A mage — any mage — who enters it confronts things beyond his control. For most mages, the challenge lies in confronting the Wilderness and either making peace with it through acceptance (as the Verbenae and Dreamspeakers do), or else conquering it through the power of personal excellence and Enlightened Arts and Sciences (as do the Hermetics and every type of technomancer).

For Nephandi, that Wilderness becomes the Labyrinth: both the physical space where they make their homes, and the mythic realm of the minotaurs they wish to be. Like Minos' monster bull, the Fallen make their homes in a symbolic and literal maze, stalking their prey through passages no one except them can understand. Their home territory is confusion; their Path is filled with traps. In terms of the Nightside, the Eaters of the Weak don't merely journey into the Wilderness; they carry it inside them and use it as a foundation for their Arts.

If you view Nephandic magick as a tangled dark forest filled with treacherous roots, sudden falls and hungry wolves, you'll have a good idea how the Fallen shape their plans and cast their spells.

### The Underworld

Going deeper still, the Nightside becomes the Underworld: The place of death where things are broken down (often painfully) and returned to base energies from which something new can grow. Gods and heroes descend into Underworlds, often in search of parts of themselves. Orpheus — whose legends inspired whole schools of magical practice — won his way past demon dogs and the monarchs

of death, and yet lost his love (and shortly afterward his life) through fear, impatience, and insecurity. Christ allowed himself to be mortally tortured at the literal crossing between heaven and earth, life and death, then descended into Hell in order to break the shackles of damnation and redeem the souls trapped therein. Inanna journeyed into the Underworld in search of her demonic sister, Ereshkigal; stripping away every power she possessed, Inanna faced the Goddess of Death. She died, had her skin stripped from her body and hung upon the walls of the Underworld, and was saved only by messengers from her uncle, the God of Wisdom, who sent Hope and Compassion to soothe Ereshkigal's torments and bring Inanna's corpse back from the dead. If the Wilderness plays host to monsters, and the shadow reveals where those monsters might be us, the Underworld strips us of all pretense and shoves our faces in our ultimate frailty: death, which ends what we think we were before. Thanatoic mages know this territory well; true shamans traditionally begin their Paths in such a state, and certain witches occupy that twilight realm of Hekate, the Morrigan, and the Baron himself. Few others, though, dare to face the Underworld on anything but an intellectual level... few others, of course, except the Fallen, for whom the Underworld is just another waystation on the way to greater depths.

Among true Nephandi, initiation begins with the Cauls and their perilous Descent into the Abyss. The Underworld, then, becomes part of them from that moment on. This isn't a mere recognition of mortality but a metaphysical alchemy of the soul. It's been said that when Inanna returned from the Underworld, she carried part of it inside her, always. The Fallen, like their Thanatoic rivals, do so too, and while devotees of the Good Death strive (ideally, anyway) to uphold life's gift and avoid the soul decay of death, Nephandi walk willingly with one foot in the Underworld.

In the living realm, Nephandi frequent the social underworlds as well: criminal societies, slave networks, sybaritic cults, prisons and asylums, war zones and refugee camps, the carnal underworlds of forbidden sex trades and the intellectual underworlds of dark web websites and radical philosophies. In those places where no laws exist save naked, brutal force, the Fallen nurture the Underworld among mortal sheep. Their pawns and companions live lives without forgiveness. Among the living, they're dead folk walking... and the Fallen put such broken lives to profitable use.

Pain is the law in the Underworld. As Dante saw, torment is common currency. Earthly hells are predatory by nature, and Otherworldly ones are... well, *hells*. For many denizens, the Underworld is a prison where even the keepers remain trapped by their sins and the force of judgments greater than their own. To move freely through the Underworld takes power; to escape it seems impossible without outside aid. Even gods get stuck in the Underworld, raging against their damnation by taking their pain out on everyone within reach; in Dante's *Inferno*, Satan himself remains frozen in a sea of ice, eternally

gnawing at the bodies of the three greatest betrayers known to Renaissance Europe. To endure the Underworld and pass through it into something more, a soul must possess formidable power and a sense of purpose and identity that refuses to be trapped or humbled. Ideally, that defiant majesty defines the Nephandic Path. A person too strong to be held in bondage and too brave to surrender to such pains needs to serve in heaven or reign in hell but can, theoretically, transcend both and assume the mantle of a god.

### The Depths

Absence: of light, of feeling, of form. Delving to the place where light never goes, never was, never reaches no matter how hard it tries, the Nightside seeker with the power to shrug aside the Underworld finds the Depths. Symbolically, the Depths represent the negation of light, order, goodness and law – the realm of Cthulhu and the madness he will bring when he arises to claim what is rightfully his. In a physical sense, the Depths are the lightless reaches of the Earth, the ocean, the Umbra and deep space: reachable if you have the will and expertise to do so, and survivable provided you've got the gear or magick that let you endure the trip. In a moral and psychological sense, the Depths feature the ultimate form of degradation, a lawless state where nothing but raw survival remains. Very few mortals, Awakened or otherwise, manage to penetrate the Depths in any sense; fewer still make a habit of such things, aside from the Fallen, for whom the Depths become – at least at a certain point of their Path — a natural state of existence.

Nephandi with powerful magicks and Otherworldly attunement can reside within the Depths, finding more comfort in the boundless darkness than they ever knew in the light. It's not easy to reach this level of attainment, though, and prey is hard to find. By the time a Nephandus sets up shop in the Depths, generally in an Umbral Labyrinth Realm secreted in or beyond the Horizon, she's too jaded for the mortal world and often too inhuman to survive long within it anyway. Exceptions exist, of course – the Arch-Nephandus Jodi Blake being the most infamous example. If the Fallen have indeed infiltrated the Traditions, Technocracy, or both, those puppet masters obviously hold such powers, too, and have chosen not to dwell in the Depths even though they could do so. For many Fallen Masters, though, the Depths are their natural home. Not a retreat, as Tradition mages often presume, but an attainment. Conventional mage lore maintain that the Fallen live in the Deep Umbra or hidden places of our world because they were driven away by rival mages. From the Nephandic perspective, they don't flee to the Depths because they have to, they move onward to the Depths because that absence of light and contact suits them better than the hectic desperation of the mortal realm.

Among the Depths, far from interfering authorities, magickal rivals, and the forces of Paradox, the Arch-Nephandi Ashraaah craft worlds in their own image: The glistening corridors of Baat'ha-Tchur, the wastelands of Ir, the airless

reaches of ruins that have no name that could be spoken in a human tongue... these strongholds of obscenity have no laws but the whims of those who rule them. For the most part, such grand lords of misrule keep to themselves — surrounded by servitors and victims, perhaps, but remote from the dealings of rival Nephandi. These twisted gilledians and sublime aswadim carve infernal paradises for themselves in the outer dark, often grotesque with sanity-bending horrors, occasionally stark and near-featureless reminders that even horror is an indulgence those Fallen Masters have moved beyond.

### The Void

At its ultimate extreme, the Nightside becomes the Void: extinction — not merely death but anti-life. One does not go from the edges of the Nightside to its darkest extremes easily; most mystics never get that far at all, and even Fallen mages get stuck (or stop themselves) in the Dark Wilderness or the Underworld. Very few, even among the Fallen, reach the heart of true Extinction. And once you reach that place, it's near impossible to come back again.

At the Abyssal extent, the false divisions among symbol, form, and state of mind disintegrate. There is no difference

here among them; all things are one in the dark. The Void collapses all distinctions into nothingness. Transcending flesh, consciousness, and sin, an Arch-Nephandus, it is said, may become a god unto themself. This space, then, may be the domain of the Dark Masters — not mere monster gods but former humans who have graduated from the mortal condition and attained the zenith (or nadir) of existence. Reaching through Thaumiel, the Qlipha of consummate attainment (see p. XX), these cosmic predators are said to have become new universes where nothing exists but the will to power suspended in aeons of pure Oblivion.

The Void is the Absolute. Beyond it, one can go no further. Although dark mystics postulate a recursive path back to mortal existence by way of this cosmic attainment, that possibility remains theoretical, if only because proving it is impossible. The Void swallows everything. Those who manage to achieve this state of ultimate darkness cease to exist as anything a human mind can comprehend. Although, as the Fallen say, humanity is a speck in the cosmic sense of things, and the journey beyond human conception runs into... and perhaps through... the Void of all.

# The Qlippoth: Plumbing the Nightside



For a word as innocuous as "shells," the legendary Qlippoth hold a fearsome reputation. Many mages refuse to even speak the word, considering it — at best — unfortunate to draw attention to those shattered worlds and their inhabitants. The nature of these entities and their origins is open to dispute; some myths portray them as the angry ghosts of worlds forsaken by their indifferent creator, while others view them as defiant spirits whose wickedness

was too much for God to bear. Their mysteries are forbidden to human beings, and so naturally human beings have studied them for ages. Whatever one chooses to believe about the Qlippoth, one element remains consistent: These forbidden realms are bad energy, filled with creatures defined by their immortal spite.

The Qlippoth is not an exclusively Nephandic concept. Darkside mystics have pursued those mysteries for centuries without going near a Caul. Still, the Fallen comprehend the Qlippoth in ways no other souls could. Nephandic initiation taps into the essence of Qlippothic energies by dropping the Nephandus into the metaphysical inversion of creation; in this sense, the Qlippoth become integral parts of the Fallen. Nephandi are who and what they are, not because they do malignant things but because they've gone diving in the embodiment of the Abyss and have been transformed on a soul-deep level. Thus, a basic understanding of the Qlippoth helps one understand the Fallen, their Arts, and their viewpoint regarding our world and their place within it.

### The Broken Vessels

According to Kabalistic lore, the Qlippoth represent a flipside to God's sacred order — a perverse reflection, instead, of disorder. The Tree of Life (Sitra de-Kedusha, "the Holy Side") manifests God's plan; the Qlippothic Tree of Knowledge (Sitra Ahra, "the Other Side") manifests what happens when God crumples that plan up and throws it in the garbage. Even in the garbage, though, the discarded "shells" of that plan continue to exist, drawing flies and worms and termites that decided, in their anger, to chew up God's desk and shit all over God's new designs.

That, at least, is what so-called "good people" claim.

Other accounts assert that the shells arose from "the breaking of the vessels," the primordial creation wherein Divinity shed holy light into the darkness, crafted vessels to hold it, and then allowed them to shatter so that purer and perfect vessels could form where they had been. The pieces of the broken vessels fell into the Abyss of Daath (see below), along with 288 sparks of Divine Light. Taking root in the darkness, those fragments of creation grew into a poisonous shadow of God's holy work, jealous in their inferior state and sworn to pull creation down around its creator's ears. Still other myths tell of the 11 Kings of Edom, the primordial land of corruption and wickedness scoured clean by the wrath of God. Certain authorities see both the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge as macrocosms of Adam, the archetypal man who bears both good and evil within him. Whatever the



case might be, the shells and their residents embody things that righteous people must shun... and so, of course, they also symbolize the Nightside of Eden, filled with fruits and secrets for those who dare to enter them.

To practitioners of Kabbalah, the Tree of Life reveals God's holy principles for those who seek to understand Divinity. To practitioners who embrace the Qlippoth, those broken vessels reveal the Tree of Knowledge and its forbidden fruit. A Kabbalistic mystic seeks to ascend through holy emanations and behold God; a Qlippothic mystic descends through tunnels and ruins, seeking to become God. Essentially, Qlippoth reflects the things "god" doesn't want us to understand... perhaps things "god" does not want to understand himself. Thus, the Qlippoth reveals the source of ultimate understanding, warts and all. Is it any wonder, then, that a false creator god doesn't want us getting anywhere near the Qlippoth? After all, that god knows what might happen if we were to learn the secrets that it holds. According to Qlippothic devotees, we might even become gods ourselves...

### The Shadows of Divinity

Like the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, the Olippoth represents a symbolic model of principles that nevertheless holds a metaphysical kind of reality, too. Where the Sephiroth represent a "tree" of emanations leading upward from the base principle of earthly reality (Malkuth) to the sublime radiance of Divinity's Crown (Kether), the Qlippoth represents a profane initiation from the mother of demons (Lilith) to the ultimate paradox of godhood through annihilation (Thaumiel). At the consummation of that paradox, the Void supposedly opens to new potential existences, sometimes referred to in occult lore as the Black Diamond or Universe B: the transcendence of this flawed cosmos through self-divinity that extinguishes the individual so some new totality can be born from nothingness. If this seems bizarre, that's pretty much the point. Such esoteric concepts transcend rational thought. Folks who try to apply conventional logic to such paradigms are not supposed to understand them in the first place.

Certain interpretations place this "Nightside of Eden" parallel to the Tree of Life; others invert it, claiming that the initiate travels *down* instead of up. The Eaters of the Weak claim their name "the Fallen" because of this Descent. Their Seekings involve dark tunnels and Realms of terrifying beauty. The Kabbalist Ascends; the Nephandus Descends. Whether or not a monotheistic creator God exists is beside the point. The Qlippoth charts the Nightside, and though its structure may be symbolic, the entities encountered within its depths are as real as any spirit is.

Among the Fallen, the Qlippoth provides a model for deeper understanding of the Nightside. From the fringes of Jung's shadow, it reaches toward the Void. Each of its waystations – or *Qlipha* – are personified by demonic overlords whose Dominions reflect infernal principles. Certain Qlippoth, like Lilith and Samael, are named specifically for

infernal overlords, while others, like Gha'ag Sheblah and Thaumiel, signify forces rather than individuals. Unlike the godly emanations of the Tree of Life, the energies of these broken spheres reflect an array of dire personages, not a single Unity whose glory holds infinite refractions. Echoing that fractured state of affairs, the Qlippothic traveler goes from Qlipha to Qlipha seeking not ultimate unity with the whole but ultimate disconnection for himself.

From a Jungian standpoint, the Qlippoth could be seen as the shadow side of Divinity - a collection of traits God does not wish to recognize. Hence, the Qlippoth is forbidden; to reach into it and deal with its denizens is to spit in the face of God. For those who favor Olippothic magicks, the "shells" are brave remnants of exiled worlds. Discarded by a fickle creator, they assert their own existence in his absence. They don't need a creator, not anymore. God tried to wash his hands of them, but they will not be denied. Instead, they dig their claws in and occupy those aspects of Divinity that he does not wish to acknowledge, not even to himself: divine hate, divine lust, divine pride most of all. And because they recognize those hidden aspects of creation and its "god" aspects which "goodness" chooses to deny - that knowledge makes them powerful. Let "god" and his people blind themselves to ugly truths! Those truths are the face of Reality, and denial simply makes them stronger.

This attitude of defiant understanding is an essential component of Qlippothic Arts. Wisdom, as far as those practices are concerned, comes from acknowledging what other people deny. No door, to this perspective, is truly barred if you're brave enough to try and open it through any means necessary. "Good" people might go to heaven, but *smart* people realize "heaven" is a lie. In the eyes of Qlippothic devotees, "god" wants slaves, not equals. Thus, "god" deserves to be defied, his rules broken, his lost children exalted and his weak creations ground under the heels of those whose birthrights were stolen by their jealous, fearful "god."

Whatever the story behind them might be, the Qlippoth are composed of the proverbial "darkness visible," existing outside of sanction and driven by their own will to exist. For obvious reasons, Qlippoth represents a dangerous and unholy heresy—an unapologetic voyage through things mortals really should leave alone.

For equally obvious reasons, Nephandi embrace that heresy even if they couldn't care less about Kabbalah or its supposed "god."

# Qlippoth, Mage, and the Nephandic Path

In Mage terms, the Qlippoth is essential to the Nephandic Path. Even if a Fallen mage does not herself believe in Kabbalah or view her Path through such occult philosophies, the essence of these forbidden shells forms an intrinsic element of her journey from Awakening to Descent. A Malfean Nephandus

# Nephandic Seekings: Supplicii

When a Nephandic mage endure a Seeking — known in the old days as a *Supplicium* — that internal journey sweeps him into the Nightside... and from there into the Qlippoth.

A voluntary Seeking involves a solitary ritual wherein the mage invokes the Qlipha he wishes to explore. Such rituals traditionally involve hallucinogenic drugs, fiendish self-torture, sexual magick, demon invocations, punishing ordeals, sacrifices of body parts and other forms of mutilation, and possibly even acts of extreme kindness and generosity; anything that shatters the Fallen One's sense of complacency is a fine tool for such a journey.

Descending through a nightmarish Nightside dream-scape, the seeker encounters his Avatar and passes into the tunnels which lead into the Qlipha in question. There, he faces challenges and obstacles appropriate to the Qlipha in question, then either fails or passes his Seeking. If successful, he receives a new point of Arete, and possibly (Storyteller's discretion, based upon the obstacles faced and the way that mage confronts them) Descends to the next Qlipha. If he fails... well, it's possible he'll survive the experience, though not without lasting cost: Scars, Flaws, Quiet, new enemies, and so forth. It's also possible he won't survive. The shells are no place for dabblers, and their inhabitants have been known to imprison or devour mortals who dare to trespass into their forsaken homes.

An involuntary Supplicium explodes into the mage's consciousness when he confronts extreme failure, demonic displeasure, defeat at the hands of godly agents, a crisis of confidence about his abilities or his capacity for evil, realization of the awful fate that awaits him at the end of his Path, a crushing Paradox backlash or an attack of Quiet; anything that devastates the Fallen One's view of himself might trigger a plunge into Daath which drops him, again, into a Qlipha he has not yet surpassed. At that point, he must confront those same sorts of obstacles but stripped naked, as lnanna was at the gates of the Underworld, and robbed of most of the power he normally commands. A Supplicium, after all, is a challenge, made far more difficult by the lack of resources a mage has come to rely upon.

As mentioned nearby, points of Arete and stages of the Qlippoth don't follow a one-to-one proposition. A Fallen mage could, like Jodi Blake, get stuck along the journey even if she reaches Arete 10 in game terms. The Qlippothic journey involves an alchemical transformation of the mage's essential self, and few travelers, if any, make it through to the legendary state of godhood that waits beyond the final Qlipha, where Satan himself is said to reside.

would view the Qlippoth as Umbral Realms of enlightening corruption; a technephandus would view them as archetypal constructions of her subconscious mind. One who trusts in alien wisdom views the Qlippoth as extradimensional states of being, while the primordial Nephandus views her trips to such places as dreamquests to past lives or elemental paradise. The shouting-mad K'llashaa magus views these spheres as backstage passes behind delusions of sanity, while the jaded postmodernist sees them as symbolic tools for deconstructing reality as we know it. The "truth" – if one exists – behind the Qlippothic Tree and its Dominions is ultimately irrelevant. Every Nephandus assumes Qlippothic essence within her soul. Whatever it is, however it came to be, the fruit of this metaphysical Tree is an innate part of who they are.

The journey through the Olippoth can be seen as a rough analog (though not an exact measurement) of a Fallen mage's Arete. The further a Nephandus journeys into the Depths of this Tree of Knowledge, the more its essence shapes her and influences the person she becomes, the magicks she pursues, and the perspective she holds as she continues along her Fallen Path. Olippothic journeys in this sense are a form of metaphysical alchemy through which the seeker is challenged, broken down, refined, and ultimately purified or consumed. Few Nephandi make it past the Black Sun of Thagiron, but although a Fallen mage may, in game terms, achieve an Arete Trait of 8 without reaching Satariel, a Nephandus who has knelt before the Throne of the Spider-Goddess holds a deeper understanding of her Path than one who has not. That understanding will influence her outlook, her tactics, and her status among the Fallen. The eventual goal of self-godhood through transcendent annihilation demands a full journey among the shells and an intimate experience of how each step of that Path influences the god that Fallen mage might become.

### Nephandic Progress Through the Qlippoth

As noted elsewhere, the Qlippoth is not exclusive to the Fallen. Even so, the Nephandic rebirth integrates Qlippothic essence into the Fallen in ways that influence the way those mages behave. The further into the shells a given Nephandus ventures, the more influence those lightless worlds have on the mage and his behavior. And although the Qlippothic journey is not a one-for-one expression of the character's Arete Trait, it's a good bet that a Fallen mage who's gone deeper into the Qlippoth will have a richer understanding of that dark enlightenment than one who's spent his career hanging around Lilith and Gamaliel.

Every magus processes such experiences differently. The ways in which the Qlippoth influence a Nephandic character, though, often follow a certain progression. A person who knows which cues to look for might be able to guess a Nephandic mage's journeys through the shells... especially if the witness in question has some Esoterica knowledge of the Qlippoth herself.

- Every Nephandus has experienced the Qlipha of Lilith.
   That raw, often uncomfortable carnal essence provides a basis for the Fallen temperament. While this doesn't mean that every Nephandus is a slavering sex fiend, the shattering of inhibitions is an essential first step for the Nephandic Path.
- Passage into *Gamaliel* awakens a potent sensuality in a Nephandic voyager, and it intensifies such feelings for a Fallen mage who was overtly sensual in the first place. That sensuality isn't necessarily sexual in the way many people experience sexual desire, but it is erotic in the sense of a richer appreciation of (possibly a craving for) sensations of all kinds. Gamaliel stimulates desire, sexual and otherwise, and so a Nephandus who's experienced this Qlipha will feel sensations, and desire them, more deeply than one who has not.
- The trickster Qlipha Samael inspires an abiding sense of sarcasm, cynicism, and debate among those who pass through its expanse. Fallen mages tend to be sardonic by nature but a journey through this Dominion enhances that sense of devilish advocation and corrosive sensibilities. Likewise, this shell's influence works its way into internal fractures of doubt and insecurity. Although he might disguise such feelings with sarcastic disdain, a Fallen mage who experiences this Qlipha certainly has internal issues with self-confidence.
- The mortal mysteries of A'arab Zaraq exert a distinctly morbid influence on mages who travel through this realm. Such people become more secretive than before, seeking forbidden secrets with unholy zeal while covering for their own growing sense of fearful mortality. Sarcasm and cynicism deepen while an obsession with death swells behind a façade of jaded disinterest. Mages who've experienced this Qlipha tend to pick arguments on general principle, poking holes in any argument for the dark joy of picking things apart.
- The Black Sun of *Thagirion* tends to inspire distance. Even formerly extroverted Nephandi grow solitary and obsessive; instead of picking over the flaws of others, they focus on their own weaknesses. Occasionally, they burst out of hermitage with an almost desperate need to connect with other people, if only for the fleeting contact of casual hookups and short (if intense) conversations before retreating back into solitude again.
- From the solitary influence of the Black Sun, mages who experience *Golchab* explode into vibrant and often violent passions. The shift from one extreme to the other can seem shocking to people who think they know those people, with certain Nephandi blowing their cover through radical swings of temperament. People who might formerly have seemed quiet or tentative

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suddenly become lusty, furious powerhouses. The fire of Golchab has no place for weakness, and so former insecurities get burnt away by fires of conviction..

- The refinement of *Gha'ag Sheblah* tempers that boastful extremity into iron confidence. The mage who's experienced this degree of attainment has nothing to prove, and so their fiery personality cools to a hard edge. A Nephandus familiar with this Qlipha tends to discard things that previously seemed important to him: lovers, comrades, children, missions, things. He might change focus, or discard all but his most vital instruments. Preparing to face the Abyss, he forsakes everything that might hold him back or anchor him to lesser concerns. Many mages who reach this stage withdraw from earthly reality entirely, setting up Realms of their own in the Horizon or Deep Umbra, where they can concentrate on enigmas beyond mortal perception.
- All Nephandi pass through Daath once; very few manage to pass through it again. That first time reflects the Fall that opens them to the influence of Olippothic emanations and metaphysically transforms them into living vessels of those shells. The second passage involves going beyond the Abyss to reach the most distant and refined Olippoth – a journey that demands courage, conviction, and an extreme degree of will and Arete. Nephandic Archmages can and do live centuries without surpassing this point, and most Fallen ones never manage it at all. Those who do appear withdrawn and even serene in comparison to their more tempestuous cousins. While the first pass through Daath instils Nephandi with Abyssal essence, passage beyond its second appearance marks them as living Abysses calm, inscrutable, and exceedingly dangerous.
- The secretive nature of Satariel inspires a Fallen mage toward secrecy beyond all normal measures. Such a master seldom reveals anything unless that revelation serves a greater agenda. Those who've wandered the webbed reaches of this Qlipha behave with unnatural calm and stillness. Like the spiders whose webs fill Satariel, a Nephandus at this level of attainment speaks and moves only when necessary... and does so with lethal finality when he finally acts.
- Ghagiel inspires dominance. Bursting forth from the stillness of Satariel, the mage behaves like the archetypal "man of action" regardless of actual gender. At this level of attainment, a Fallen magus begins to topple the accomplishments of other people even those of his fellow Nephandi. Consumed by the urge to defile and destroy, this Eater of the Weak considers everybody weak, even his former comrades. A magus who attains Ghagiel becomes an implacably wicked Archmage, an

# Metaphysical Canon

Does this section mean that Mage's world ultimately follows mystic Jewish monotheism, with all the requisite demons and myths? No. Metaphysics are never a one-size-fits-all proposition, especially not in a game world where subjective reality is the foundation of the game. Although the Qlippoth emanations do exist in a metaphysical sense, at least as far as the Fallen are concerned, they can be viewed through any number of philosophical lenses, most of which — like some divine kaleidoscope, shift and change depending on who's looking at them and from which perspective. This section explores a small slice of the Qlippoth as Fallen mages see it. The ultimate reality is, as always in Mage, elusive and unique. Every **Mage** player or Storyteller will view these elements differently. The ultimate reality is yours, not ours, to decide.

- especially potent gilledian or a potential aswad aspiring to join the legendary six at Leviathan's table. This Qlipha represents the final step toward self-godhood, and gods are notoriously bloody-handed predators.
- Thaumiel is the doorway to Nephandic Ascension. A Fallen mage who has reached the realm but not yet approached or seized its pandimensional throne essentially becomes a dark Oracle, a new Aswad among the ranks of Fallen demigods. A magus who somehow manages to claim the Qlipha's ultimate reward, the Consummation of Leviathan, disappears from this reality and becomes a god of his own universe.

### Qlippothic Game Systems

From a rules standpoint, "Qlippothic Spheres" employ all the usual systems. There's no rules-based difference between, say, Qlippothic Entropy and the regular Entropy Sphere. The differences come across through the mindset involved — from the perspective of the mage casting spells from a Fallen point of view. In terms of gameplay, the rules don't change; the intention behind the character's activities, though, comes from a literally "other" place.

To a mage of Qlippothic inclinations, magick is the force of Otherworldly exile set free. The powers channeled through a person's connection to the shell realms synergize that person's Awakened understanding and the forbidden forces of Qlippothic realms and entities. By Nephandic reckoning, the Spheres command reality as we know it through their connection to the Qlippothic Dominions, the essences they hold, and the infernal godheads who govern those Dominions. Although the powers of a given Sphere aren't tied exclusively to a single Dominion — the Life Sphere, for instance, is not the sole province of Lilith even though that

entity and her Dominion are closely associated with it — the connection between a Sphere, a Qlipha, and the demonic entity who governs it is often obvious when a Nephandic magus commands the powers of that Sphere.

A character doesn't have to be a Nephandus in order to approach the Spheres from a Qlippothic point of view. That said, any mage who works with the Qlippoth will be, at the very least, a subject of grave suspicion among her colleagues, if only because the "shells" are so deeply associated with the Fallen and their Arts.

For those who understand such powers and principles, the Nine Spheres can be regarded in the following ways:

- Correspondence, the Art of removing obstacles and tying things together, is most closely associated with Thagirion, the Qlipha of disunity. Through the principles of Thagirion Correspondence, the binding fabric of the universe (and the metaphysical Tapestry) may be unraveled and separated thanks to sufficient understanding of such forces.
- Entropy, the principle of random chance, fate, and decay, is traditionally associated with Samael, "the Poison of God" the Qlipha through which Divine order is reduced to its rightful component, chaos.
- Forces, the tempestuous elemental Sphere, is often associated with Golchab, the raging Qlipha of violence and storm. By unleashing such violence upon the mortal world, the magus tears mortal illusions apart and burns such delusions away with the power of eternal rage.
- Life, the most carnal and fecund of Spheres, is associated with Lilith, Dominion of the Dark Mother and all her spawn. Through her primordial lust and the understanding Lilith gained through by the fruit of the forbidden Tree of Knowledge, a practitioner of Qlippothic Life magicks can create, destroy, or reconstruct the living issue inspired by the dark womb and its primal creatrix.
- Matter, the Sphere that commands the most stubborn of elements, is traditionally associated with Gha'ag Sheblah, the Qlipha of departure from material concerns. Through this realm's connection to the elemental precipice, a magus may reform concrete materials and assumptions into components of potential, or else annihilate rigid forms into fragments of Absolute Chaos.
- Mind, the swirling tide of consciousness, is traditionally associated with the Qlipha Satariel the Black Water of the Abyss. Those tides wash away mortal delusions and then carry them down into the infinite Depths wherein there is no ego, no thought, and no consciousness, only the timeless suspension of ultimate oblivion.

• Prime, the Lifeblood of Creation, often gets associated with Gamaliel, the realm of dark dreaming. Within this Qlipha, the Obscene Ones — Lilith and her endless lovers — bring the essence of Creation into and out of being. Their savage lusts break down the fragile stability of the world as we know it, churn it into raw energy, and return it to Creation as the raw pulp of possibility. Ultimately, of course, such action produces not life but death. Thus, the lightless dreams of eternal lust bear fruition as the urges and essence of both life and death.

Certain authorities associate Gamaliel with Mind, ceding the Prime Sphere to Satariel instead. Fallen sorcerers connect Creation's essence with Lilith's demonic sexuality, and that sexuality and its Dark Mother are associated with both Dominions.

- Spirit, the communion Sphere between material illusions and sublime ephemera, is associated with Ghagiel. Where Lilith is the vessel, Ghagiel is the deliverer. Through their intercourse, vacant matter is filled with ephemeral semen. And ruled as it is by the Lord of the Flies, the enriched matter is broken down and carried away on the legs of Beelzebub's servitors, returned to their Lord, and issued once again. The Spirit Sphere bursts through earthly reason and projects demonic influence into the world.
- Time, the Art that disperses all sureties, is associated with A'arab Zaraq, the Ravens of Dispersion. Just as time is said to fly, so too do the ravens associated with Baal, Black Venus, and Tubal Cain, all of whom scatter mortal expectations and pick apart their bones.
- The Absolute, a rumored Nephandic 10th Sphere, comprises the force of ultimate extinction. Fallen mages who pass through the lowest Depths, assume Thaumiel, and enter the Void are said to claim this power as a birthright of dark godhood. With it, theoretically, a Nephandic God-Magus commands absolute reality within a new and self-contained universe. Whether or not this is true remains impossible to prove... for now.

# Daath and the Cauls: Initiation to the Abyss

Nephandic initiation begins with a trip through the cracks of the Tree of Life...or perhaps, more accurately, in the whirling vortex between sublime wisdom and earthly passions that so often cuts humanity off from the highest principles of divine creation. In the mortal world, this Descent begins with entrance through the Caul, into Daath, and down into the dark frontiers of Qlippothic experience.

### Daath: The Abyssal Door to Knowledge

In the metaphysical space between the lower seven Sephiroth and the top three that signify the highest divine principles, there's a gap in the tree known as Daath. (Also transliterated as Da'at and Daas.) Often referred to as the "Abyss," but also as the "Door to Knowledge," Daath represents the existential gulf between human aspirations and divine essence – a sort of black hole through which the higher emanations may be seen only by seekers of pure heart and selfless intentions. When confronted by Daath, Kabbalistic seekers have been known to plunge into despair. Although its Kabbalistic interpretation refers to a paradoxically divided unity between Da'at Elyon ("higher knowledge") and Da'at hane'elam ("hidden knowledge"), a Olippothic reading of this space refers to a freefall into the discarded shells of lightless pilgrimage - the precipitous Night of Pan wherein the seeker Falls from one metaphysical tree to another, dying to her former life and being reborn into a state of forbidden knowledge.

Paradoxically, Daath appears twice in the Nephandic journey through the Qlippoth: First while Descending through the Caul, and second while confronting the awful immensity between the first seven Qlippoth and the final, most transcendent three. Both times, the Abyss gapes wide — first in invitation, then in defiance. Any Nephandus can face the Abyss once, but few manage to work around that second obstacle and reach the ultimate heights (or, more accurately, depths) of accomplishment.

In Hebrew, Da'at means "knowledge," and so Daath is said by many Kabbalistic authorities to represent the symbolic union of wisdom and understanding. To Nephandi familiar with Kabbalistic concepts, that's exactly what Daath is: The ultimate knowledge of creation's awful state, stripped of illusions and catapulted into a well of anguish from which the truest form of knowledge comes. Certain modern explorations of Kabbalah view Daath as the gulf between sublime Divinity and the earthly forces manifested in a flawed creation; torn through the Tree of Life by the fall from Eden, this gulf becomes a vortex of primordial energies leading to the Qlippoth and its forbidden Tree of Knowledge. In order to reach those unspeakable realms and forces, one must "fall away" from earthly illusions and divine aspirations. Only through such a fall – in Nephandic terms, the Fall – can a person experience true knowledge and attain a state of being free from the chains of delusion and submission.

And the vehicle, for Nephandi, of such initiatory transformation is...

### The Caul: Dark Flower of Rebirth

"Ask," says the teaching of Christ, "and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." In an awful yet typically Nephandic irony, the words of Matthew

7 reveal the passage between Daath and the Qlippoth; one "knocks at the door of knowledge" and gets delivered to the answer she was seeking. For a Nephandus, the door in question is a Caul, and by passing through the Caul the seeker gets passage to the Abyss.

Dion Fortune referred to this passage as "the force of Ring-Chaos," an unmaking storm swirling earthly essence into the void of outer space. The physical form of each Caul is a manifestation of pandimensional unmaking — a gateway that allows a mortal to enter a spiritual rift and access a region that no amount of Umbral voyaging could reach. Within that region, the person's essence is tested to destruction, pulled apart by the stress of unmaking... and possibly also by guardian entities from the Qlippoth. It's been said that a mage's Avatar is turned inside out by a Caul; on a deeper level, however, that Avatar undergoes a sort of stabilized, voluntary Gilgul that tears it apart, transforms it, infuses it with malignant energies, and reassembles that person and their spirit into a pure mortal form of the Abyss itself,

Not all Nephandi are Kabbalists, of course. Hell, most of them have only a vague understanding of where Qlippothic energies fit into esoteric Judaism. The energies themselves, however, are a fundamental aspect of Fallen identity. Any mage can be an asshole, practice black magick, and become a murderous monster. Becoming a true Nephandus (as opposed to a dupe, a pawn, or an otherwise evil mage) requires passage through the Caul, infusion with Qlippothic energies, and the unmaking of that person from who she *was* into who she is *now*.

Physically, a Caul resembles a large and eerie flower, pod, mouth, or some other organic entranceway to a fleshy sealed space. Some resemble fungi, while others seem like titanic genitalia. Typically, the Caul quivers when living things approach it, opens if a would-be explorer strokes it, and can be coaxed into opening by a Fallen Nephandus who wants to employ it. Many Nephandic lairs have a single Caul, but large Labyrinths can host several. Clearly organic, these living gateways pulsate, flush, and writhe. Thick, fleshy smells - often sweet, occasionally intoxicating, and generally laced with a repugnant undertone - surround the Cauls. When opened, a Caul bleeds a sticky sap, and glows with an unsettling radiance that resembles purple, red, or blueish light but feels more like the absence of light than like anything human senses regard as illumination. A Caul's embrace combines an infusion of damp warmth with a bone-deep, aching chill. As the Caul shuts, the person inside feels a vertiginous sense of falling into the not-light as a searing blast of agony begins...

Unwilling people can be forced into a Caul but cannot be converted unless they want to be. A person who's shoved into a Caul against his will gets sealed into a metaphysical torture chamber. Within its confines, his soul is slowly ripped apart (not permanently Gilguled, but scattered and banished from that earthly form) while his body, possessions, and consciousness are essentially squeezed through a cosmic shredder. When the Caul reopens, nothing salvageable remains.

Passage into a Caul takes that person outside of time and space. No physical or temporal dimensions exist for her. Within the Caul, everything that constitutes that person's identity plunges into the Abyss through a cataclysm of torturous sensations. Everything is now — no past, no future — and here, not there. The Abyss consumes, unmakes, instills, and reconstitutes that person into a new essential form. The person who emerges from the Caul — wet and gooey, shivering with pain yet unspeakably delighted — essentially comes down from an excruciating cosmic orgasm, transformed by sublime alchemy into a living vessel of the Void.

What *are* these things? How do they manifest, and why? Some Nephandi claim they're living holes in the fabric of creation, obscene anti-Nodes that assume a perverse organic shape. Others call them the "Flowers of Rebirth," extensions of the Tree of Knowledge that grow through dimensions and bud in the mortal realm. Fallen mages who favor infernal cosmology claim the Cauls manifest the fruits of Hell, while those of alien inclination view the Cauls as extraterrestrial beings. Although skilled Nephandi strive to create them with titanic rituals (see Invoke the Caul, p. XX), these gateways cannot be created by human mages alone. More often than not, the Fallen build their hideaways around an existing Caul rather than try and conjure one within a human construction. Ultimately, the nature of Cauls remains a mystery. They seem to grow where they will, not manifest at the urgings of a mere mage.

Can Cauls be destroyed? Not by physical means alone. Although cataclysmic disasters (nuclear blasts, huge storms, intense fires, and so forth) can damage a Caul's physical manifestation, that damage heals itself over time. A combined assault of Forces 5, Prime 5, and Spirit 5 can seal a Caul for the present time, but such portals appear to have a will of their own. At times, they simply wither and disappear of their own accord. Some legendary Cauls, however, have endured since antiquity, and can be found in desolate ruins, forgotten caves, and regions where tradition wisely forbids people from getting close to an ancient evil that awaits a new discovery.

### Trees and Tunnels

As with the Tree of Life, the Qlippothic Tree features 10 emanations (represented by spheres) connected by "branches" that run between them. In Kabbalah, those branches connect principles on a multidimensional level, and a pilgrim who wishes to ascend the Tree of Life uses those pathways to reach one Sephirah from another. In Qlippoth, the pathways are perceived as tunnels running through the Nightside and connecting the various Qlipah through labyrinthine mazes. It's this network of hidden tunnels that inspired the Labyrinths where Fallen mages gather and make their homes; according to rumor, many of those Nephandic strongholds have passageways that lead right into the Qlippoth itself.

In most accounts, these tunnels resemble surreal caves, mazes, and catacombs, lit by eldritch illumination or, quite often, completely dark. Ghosts, demons, and other horrific

things haunt these tunnels, attacking and devouring those unworthy of progress through those paths. Each of the 21 major passageways is said to be a stage of initiation in itself, with names and characteristics unique to a given path. Dozens, perhaps hundreds, of other tunnels wind their way through the Nightside of Eden; some have names and arcane correspondences, while others remain nameless and all but forgotten. It's easy for travelers to lose their way within this haunted maze...and that, of course, is part of the point of that maze in the first place. To navigate the Qlippothic tunnel paths, a seeker must be brave, powerful, fortunate, and ruthless in her dedication to plumb the darkness or die trying.

# The Qlippothic Dominions

So, is the Qlippoth a metaphor, a collection of Umbral Realms, or both? That depends on who you ask. Questions like that keep mages awake all night, arguing points that depend more upon belief than on provable foundations. Given Mage's core premise — belief shapes reality — the Qlippoth may exist as Umbral Realms simply because people believe they do. Like so many metaphysical concepts, the Qlippoth and Sephiroth are symbolic roadmaps to esoteric truths which probably exist in some form more concrete than mere symbolism. In that sense, then, the Qlippoth *do* exist as extraphysical Realms and entities — *and* they're also symbolic constructs created within the last few centuries in order to explain things too controversial to fit into orthodox Kabbalstic thought. As any mage or Mage player knows, a thing can be "true" in several different ways and yet still remain "real."

Unlike most Umbral Realms, however, the Qlippoth cannot be reached through the normal methods of Otherworldly travel. An astral voyager can reach them through intense meditation on the shells and their properties, but such meditations require an understanding of the Olippoth – in game terms, at least two dots in Esoterica (Qlippoth) - plus the usual astral-projection methods detailed in Mage 20, pp. 476-478. Casual wanderers cannot stumble into the Olippothic Realms, however, though it's possible that a tangled Path of the Wyck or a passageway deep in a Nephandic Labyrinth might extend into the tunnels running between the Olippothic Dominions. Cauls lead from the material world to the borders of Lilith's Olipha, and an initiated Nephandus travels into the Olippoth during a Seeking. Beyond those methods, though, the Tree of Knowledge exists more as an esoteric concept than as a collection of worlds. In Mage cosmology, the Kabbalistic Sephiroth and Qlippothic Qlipha might be regarded as Zones instead of Umbral Realms, permeating all layers without bleeding into any of them. (See Mage 20, pp. 101-102.)

As mentioned earlier, each shell realm is known as a Qlipha (also, *Qlipa*). Every one of these 10 emanations are essentially Dominions, or worlds, unto themselves — ever-shifting and theoretically borderless, yet connected to one another by the network of tunnels that pass from realm to realm. A traveler must find those tunnels in order to journey

from one Dominion to the next, and although she might have her Avatar as a guide through these sinister kingdoms, every Qlippothic traveler must otherwise face the Abyss alone.

Progress through the 10 Qlippoth begins at 10 and arrives at 1. Those 10 Qlipha, according to Qlippothic lore, are as follows:

### IO: Lilith, the Queen of Night

The entrance to the Tree of Knowledge — and the first stop when a Nephandus enters a Caul — is named for the infamous first woman: unwilling mate of Adam, reputed lover of God, furious exile from the Edenic Paradise, mother of demons, and the archetypal (though often unjustly maligned) dark mother and seductress deity. Sumerian and Hebrew scriptures declare Lilith the defiled fount of sensual abominations; devotees know her as the shunned woman, rejected because she refused to bow before the degradations of gods and men. As the base of Qlippothic questing, the Qlipha of Lilith is a sensuous garden of delights where angels fear to tread.

Because Lilith is known as "the moon who refused to yield to the sun," Lilith's Qlipah is a realm of eternal moonlight, washed by tempests and nurtured by rich soil and the blood of its inhabitants and the few creatures who venture there. A bottomless ocean filled with malignant sea creatures laps at the shores where lush gardens of ever-ripe fruit grow. Owls, bats,



and ravens dart through the twilit skies; wolves howl and cats sneak. Humid winds stroke the surface, while lightless tunnels curl beneath the land. Thrusting ruins, overrun with vegetation or half-swallowed by the earth, dot the surroundings, tiny and pale in comparison to the vast forests and abyssal seas. Cries of passion, hunger, and despair echo throughout Lilith's realm. Rich scents saturate the air, and travelers to this dark eden often find themselves lost forever in the savage beauty of this place, sometimes devoured or seduced to death by Lilith's hungry denizens.

Associated with the Sphere of Life, Lilith represents the dark reflection of *Malkuth*: The earthly plane bottoming out the Tree of Life. This Qlipha's forces marshal the serpentine essence of carnal mysteries. It's fitting that Qlippothic initiation begins in this shell; like the demon goddess whose name it bears, Lilith embodies the restless life force in all its ruthless grace.

Although named for Lilith, this first Qlipha is governed by Naamah, Fallen Angel of Carnal Pleasures — daughter of Cain, consort of Samael, and the sister, lover, and daughter of Lilith herself. Appearing as a magnificent queen of inhuman beauty and wild temperament, Naamah delights in sensual pleasures and animalistic passions. Like Lilith, Naamah embodies the wild, primal feminine principle, refusing to be governed by men and consuming those who seek to tame her. Her Dominion seethes with hungry plants, sexual demons, and implacably wild beasts. Some folk claim the Paths of the Wyck tie this Qlipha to the rawest Realms of the Middle Umbra and the chthonic woods near the Aelder Bole. Regardless of the truth behind that claim, Lilith comprises an untamable lust for life through which a Qlippothic voyager must quest before he finds passage to further realms.

### 9: Gamaliel, the Obscene Ones

Coiled in eternal fornication, "the Obscene Ones" at the heart of Gamaliel are Lilith and her many partners in carnality. Intimately connected to the realm that bears her name, the Dark Mother governs this equally sensuous and fecund Qlipha. Like that initiatory realm, the second shell writhes in primal abandon. Here, however, the life force quickens to embrace more rigid constructions of metal, wood, and stone. Still wreathed in vegetation but promising more shelter and security, these structures represent the phallic force embraced by and yet penetrating the wild feminine.

Where Lilith connects to the Life Sphere, Gamaliel corresponds to Prime, whose essence permeates Creation. In a mystic sense, this energy could be seen as metaphysical sexual emissions, drenching the realm and its inhabitants with ever-flowing vigor. The moon still dominates the sky of this Qlipha, but that body shines with crimson illumination — a blood-moon glow of voluptuous pregnancy. Sex demons and vampiric creatures stalk this realm, which — according to legend — forms the paradise for the so-called Bahari cultists who follow Lilith's path. Lilithian pilgrims are said to reach this place through their dreams, often aided by the incubi and succubi who call this realm their home.

As the shadow aspect of the world soul, the Anima Mundi, Gamaliel represents the flipside of the Sephirah Yesod — the

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palace of the unconscious mind. As such, both realms are intimately tied to dreams... possibly connected through tenuous pathways to the Dream Zone and perhaps to the darkest realms of fey Arcadia. Certain Qlippothic mages associate Gamaliel with Mind instead of Prime, though its generative powers and atavistic elementalism suggest raw life force, not intellectual consciousness. As with the previous realm, this Qlipha features humid air and vast liquid bodies; in Gamaliel, though, that "water" is more often composed of blood. The land itself pulsates with erotic energy. Here, tides of passion and storm wash over wilderness and settlements alike. While the Qlipha Lilith seems rooted and eternal, Gamaliel is a realm in constant motion.

#### 8: Samael, the Poison of God

If God is surety, then Samael, "the Poison of God," is the corrosion of that certainty. Named for its overlord, a consort of Lilith and a sibling (or aspect) of Lucifer, this Qlipha represents doubt and decay. The Left-Hand Path is said to begin here, where the comforts of the flesh are torn away by uncertainty and exposed to temptation's lash.

Like its Kabbalistic mirror-sphere *Hod*, Samael breaks discernable patterns into component pieces which can, in turn, be analyzed. For that reason, this Qlipha tends to be associated with Entropy and its results. Where Hod clarifies, however, Samael confuses. A Qlippothic pilgrim must be prepared to see her preconceptions shattered and dissolved in the influence of this realm...perhaps to be assembled into new philosophies, maybe to be lost for good.

Samael, to initiates, is the infernal trickster, the demonic jester who deconstructs what those people think they know. He takes the proverbial wrecking ball to God's foundations and pours acid on humanity's clay feet. Hence, his realm is a puzzle of switchbacks and mazes, cracked mirrors and wavering mirages whose existence exposes the uncertain nature of all forms of so-called truth. Where Lilith and Gamaliel feature lush surroundings rich with life, Samael becomes an arid, shifting wasteland where earthquakes and dust storms keep the surroundings as unstable as the beliefs Samael destroys.

As befits the master of such a realm, Samael is a gorgeous yet terrible entity whose appearance shifts across a spectrum of fearsome desires. Like his infernal kin Lucifer and Mephistopheles, the Poison of God excels at temptation, assuming the persona that seems most appealing to those who encounter him. Although he can adopt a classy veneer, Samael seems most comfortable sharing the savage aspect of his lovers Lilith and Naamah, ripping sophistication down the middle and exposing the carnal beast inside. In this primal guise, he's been known to lead the Wild Hunt of Hell, chasing trespassers and would-be pilgrims through the tunnels of the Tree of Knowledge. Although his presence teases answers... and occasionally provides them, too... Samael personifies the alchemical process of dissolution: the breaking down of existing structures of thought and form. Often associated with the gods Loki, Coyote, Hermes, and Anubis, Samael is a voracious force of trickster paradox.

## 7: A'arab Zaraq, the Ravens of Dispersion

Time flees on raven wings, and so the Qlipha known as "the Ravens of Dispersion" is most commonly associated with the Sphere of Time. Dark counterpart to *Netzach*, the Sephirah of Victory, A'arab Zaraq represents war and the death that comes with it. Just as the dove is symbolically associated with Netzach, the raven holds the key to A'arab Zaraq; like that dove, those charnel birds bear messages to and from the gods. For the Ravens of Dispersion, though, the messages are forbidden secrets, tidings of war, and the passage of souls from the state of living to the state of death. Once done with their messaging, these Qlippothic ravens fat themselves on the innards of the slain. Time is, in many ways, the Sphere of ultimate mortality, and A'arab Zaraq (also known as *Harab Serapel*) reflects mortality too.

Yet in contrast to the arid realm of Samael, the stormy realm of A'arab Zaraq features thick greenery and rushing waters. Here, Qlippothic travelers may be immersed for a "black baptism" in swirling lightless pools. Bones, picked clean by corvid scavengers, gleam in the dim abyssal glow. Scores of ravens wheel through the clouds. In the sky above, the Black Sun of the neighboring Qlipha Thagirion shines sublime illumination of not-light upon the vast fields and towering hills of this realm. The red soil muddies with shed blood, nurturing rose brambles of black and dark crimson, but the stark white temples of this realm's overlords remain pristine. Despite associations with the darkest aspects of Wotan One-Eye and the black-feathered Morrigan, this Qlipha is the Dominion of Baal, Black Venus, and Tubal Cain, brother of Naamah and the Maker of Sharp Weapons. Their shared, if contentious, rulership keeps Harab Serapel in a state of glorious warfare and voluptuous sexuality. Shades of long-dead warriors, assassins and harlots fuck and kill one another with equal vigor, often sharing their eternal pastimes with minor demons and mortal visitors. Battles and orgies – usually mingled into bloody tangles of fornicating bodies – spill across the realm's lush wilderness, watering the roses, reddening the waters, and pleasing the cruel eyes of A'arab Zaraq's ruling entities.

Those three entities possess an awful beauty. Naked Baal sports a muscular build, a golden Babylonian crown, thick black hair, and often the head of a black bull with fiery eyes and golden horns; upon occasion — in wrath or in battle — he'll carry a massive spiked club and assume a three-headed form with the bull's head in the center, a wolf's head on the right shoulder, and the head of a dragon or gigantic toad on the left. Venus Illegitima, Goddess of Perversions, is sometimes associated with the Red Woman of Revelations or an especially dark aspect of Inanna or Aphrodite. Nude in all forms, she glistens with sweat on her obsidian skin, drips with golden jewelry, and sometimes bears nine thin veils or bared instruments of war. Tubal Cain, heavily muscled, is the inhumanly handsome descendant of the First Murderer and reputed sire of vampires; his sooty dark skin bears the marks

of his forge, but those burns and scalds simply make him seem more desirable. Like his co-regents, Tubal Cain often goes nude but bears an array of sharp metal weapons, still glowing from his forge. The three regents often lead forces of demons and ghosts rampaging across the land — generally against one another, occasionally against otherwise-occupied denizens, and frequently against trespassers of the realm.

Despite... or perhaps because of... its connections to time and mortality, A'arab Zaraq remains locked in seemingly eternal stasis. Nothing seems to grow or die in this realm, merely to maintain a similar state of growth until something comes along to temporarily "kill" a denizen of the place — a denizen soon resurrected by the elemental sweep of the Qlippothic ravens' wings.

#### 6: Thagirion, the Disputers

At the center of the Dark Tree burns the Black Sun, Thagirion, illuminator of forbidden understanding. Despite its plural name, "the Disputers," this singular body radiates an incandescent anti-light throughout the 10 Qlippoth. Beneath that glow, a garden of shadows writhes with restless winds. In this garden, the traveler finds herself alone with her fears. under the Black Sun, even the Avatar disappears from view — perhaps retreating inside the mage's self, perhaps leaving her to be judged on her own testimony, without guidance or companionship.

The name *Thagirion* refers to legal disputes, and so the traveler through this Qlipha finds herself on trial. The whispering shadows of the Garden hiss accusations and bear witness to her sins. In the distance, rumbling sounds disturb the stillness, occasionally shaking the ground beneath her feet. Those disturbances come from the toil of *zomiel*: huge demonic obsidian giants who labor in hidden workshops to undo the work others of their kind have done, or to haul stones from cairns and monuments built by fellow zomiel in order to destroy what the others have created. The dark reflection of its Kabbalistic twin *Tiferet*, the Black Sun and its surroundings represent disorder, conflict, and the strain of holding disparate forces together when they wish to fly apart.

Like the paradox of a Black Sun radiating anti-light, Thagirion is a state of suspended opposites united through conflict with one another. Fittingly, it's ruled by two forces: Sorath, the Sun Demon, "the Adversary of the Lamb" and an embodiment of human wickedness and opposition to the Christ-self; and Belphegor, the Goetic Lord of the Dead. The first entity reflects the urge to rebellion and the champion of the inner rogue, while the second is the many-faced guardian of death's gate and the riches one might draw forth from the Underworld. Because of the doors opened by revolt and sealed or unlocked by death, this realm of Disputers holds traditional associations with the Correspondence Sphere. Just as Sorath and Belphegor share a lawless state of judgment over their teeming-yet-empty realm, the apparent contradictions of Correspondence share a counter-logical state of being everywhere yet nowhere, radiating gloom and illuminating the shells with darkness.

Don't worry — it isn't *supposed* to make sense. Counterlogic is an essential component of Thagirion.

A traveler to Thagirion is essentially put on trial, not by a formal court of law (demonic or otherwise) but by the sense of exile and loneliness this realm engenders. Despite the distant sound of laboring zomiel and the presence of two demonic overlords, most visitors to Thagiron find themselves alone, with only shadows and their own thoughts as company. Aside from the Black Sun itself, no landmarks exist to show the voyager where she has been and where she's hoping to go. In place of the forests, seas, and temples of previous Qlippoth, the seat of the Black Sun is formless and indistinct. In it, one relies upon luck and intuition; to venture past this Qlipha, that traveler must surrender to uncertainty and throw herself, as it were, on the dark mercy of the shadows and the forces that wait beyond them.

#### 5: Golchab, the Flaming Ones

From darkness and shadow, a Qlippothic traveler moves to flame. Golchab, the Dominion of Asmodeus, is the proverbial lake of fire, raging with elemental wrath and burning all fears and reservations away. No weakness survives this Qlipha. No cowards can face it and endure. Golchab embodies the fiery hells of legend, and the Nephandus who can pass through it unscathed is a soul to be reckoned with.

An infernal reflection of the Sephiroth *Geburah* ("Judgment"), Golchab represents divine wrath and punishment. According to certain tales, the Qlippothic Tree itself was formed when God's fury spilled upon the earth after the war in heaven or the rape of Eden. Flames of eternal fire surged through the cracks of that flawed Creation and forged the domain of torment for Fallen angels and Fallen souls. There is no mercy to be found in Golchab — no refuge in its inferno. Whereas Thagirion represents a trial by dispute and despair, Golchab is the literal trial by fire.

Befitting a realm of endless flame and burning storms, Golchab bears obvious kinship to the Sphere of Forces. Through that connection, Nephandic wizards command elemental tempests and unbound passions. For just as this Qlipha features actual fire, it likewise inspires flames of lust, rage, and terror — psychological destruction as well as physical harm. Those who endure such flames become pillars of flame themselves, not necessarily in a physical sense (though that's been known to happen, too) but in the sense of ecstatic carnality and boundless fury.

"Boundless fury" is as apt a description as any for the ruling power of Golchab: Asmodeus, "Rage of God," Lord of the Nine Hells and personification of unbridled angry lust. Known also as Aesma-Daeva ("Divine Being of Wrath"), Asmodaios or Asmodai, Hashmedai or Hammadai, Asmodée, and a variety of other names, this titanic entity often appears as a huge muscular man with three heads, a serpent-headed tail, and a terrible attitude...perhaps because no one seems to get his name right. Known as Asmoday in The Lesser Key of Solomon, Asmodeus rides a dragon, and he breathes fire himself as well.

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Unlike the near-empty realm of the Black Sun, this demon-lord's realm is populated with fire elementals and the flame-happy devils of Christian lore. When roused to even greater heights of anger, Asmodeus dispatches his infernal legions to punish the offenders with an anguish even angels fear.

According to infernal rumors, Golchab winds its way into the Nine Hells of the Astral World. Through baking tunnels of searing earth, shaped flames, and white-hot metal, a demon or mortal traveler might venture from those hells to this Qlipha or back the other way. Powerful Infernalists and Fallen Masters claim to have made this pilgrimage, often more than once. The truth of such claims lies within the twisted labyrinths between those realms or else gets lost in the heat of ever-burning stars.

Fire purifies as it destroys. Thus, Golchab burns away doubt and hesitation. To pass through this realm, a voyager must command awesome powers and steely self-control. She must be ready not merely to walk through fire but to take it as a lover and let it consume her without burning her away. Golchab is a realm of lust as well as anger, and so sexual communion with demons — perhaps with Asmodeus himself — is part of the journey through this Qlipha. As with every other element of this tempestuous sphere, that sex must be like war: a vicious struggle where lust becomes suffering and suffering becomes lust. The soul who cannot bear the heat may find herself trapped in Golchab for eternity, bound with unendurable agony by the fact that she feared to burn.

#### 4: Gha'ag Sheblah, the Smiter

From the fire, one reaches the anvil: Gha'ag Sheblah, the Qlipa of Smiting. Spelled in some sources as Gha'agshblah ("the Smiter"), and known also as Gamchicoth ("the Devourers"), this sphere corresponds to the Sephiroth Chesed, or "Mercy." Unlike its counterpart, however, this Qlipha has no mercy to give. Instead, the voyager stands — seared, scourged, and stripped naked by her travels — at the edge of the Abyss and the verge between the lower Qlippoth of material stability and elemental dimensions, and the higher Qlippoth of immaterial substance: things that cannot be grasped but are nonetheless real.

Although its name suggests a brutal blacksmith, the true pounding a traveler receives here is the devastation of perceptions and surety. This Qlipha destroys whatever might be left of the pilgrim's reservations regarding the Fallen Path. To explore and pass through this realm, a Nephandus must surrender everything she believes she was before. Thus, few Fallen Ones make it past the gate at the end of this Qlipha... not because monsters assault them but because the realm's monsters are within.

With the Qlippoth's usual sense of inversion, this final stage of the journey is often associated, by Nephandic mages, with the Matter Sphere. Partly, this inversion represents the final crowning of elemental essences with mute "inert" material (which may have been a subtle influence on, or parody of, Anton LaVey's

contention that Spirit is the element of least Satanic importance); on a deeper level, though, it reflects the myth most commonly associated with Gha'ag Sheblah: that of the Sumerian goddess Inanna and her Descent into the Underworld.

In the most conventionally understood version of this myth (several versions exist), mighty Inanna passes through seven gates on her way into the Underworld. At each gate, she must surrender an item of power: her clothing, her jewelry, her weapons, and her badges of office. By the time she stands at the final gate and confronts the gatekeeper Neti, Inanna is naked and powerless aside from her innate abilities. When the haughty goddess demands to know why she - one of the most potent deities on earth – must submit to such indignities, Neti warns her: "Quiet, Inanna, the ways of the underworld are perfect. They may not be questioned." Inanna submits, but as she passes through that gate, her dark sister Ereshkigal "fastened upon Inanna the eye of Death, spoke against her the word of Wrath, and uttered against her the cry of Guilt." Surrounded by her servants, the Judges of Death, Ereshkigal strikes Inanna dead and hangs her corpse on the wall of the Underworld. Only through the intercession of Enki, the god of wisdom, is Inanna restored to life and allowed to return to the living world... assuming, of course, that she can find someone else to take her place... which, naturally, she does. Even then, Inanna forever bears a part of the Underworld within her. The journey into death is eternal even for those who return from it. And so, by the time a traveler reaches Gha'ag Sheblah, there's no turning back. To pass through it is to die to the material world, to surrender mortal power and attachments, and to carry forever afterward the legacy of the journey beyond. The final discarded "garment" connected with the material world is therefore Matter itself. A Nephandic seeker who reaches the Smiter attains a deeper understanding of the Matter Sphere even as she chooses to leave material attachments behind.

In another level of perverse inversion, the demonic ruler of Gha'ag Sheblah is known by several names and two different genders: the masculine Asteroth, and the feminine Ashtoreth, both of whom are traditionally associated with Astarte, AKA Ishtar, AKA Inanna. By its innate nature, this Qlipha subverts expectations and ties "facts" into ephemeral pretzels, and so its ruling power has several apparent identities that bend and shift in recursive yet related ways. That paradox becomes even more obvious when one realizes that modern interpretations of the Old Testament refer to "the Ashtaroth" as a class of female demons, not as a singular demon of any gender. As may be expected from a Qlipa known for smiting perceived reality, Gha'ag Sheblah is a mass of contradictions.

As befits the nature of this place, Gha'ag Sheblah appears as a twisting, black Escherian maze, lit by blazing forges and bending back and around itself, operating on a number of planes and directions at once. Throughout the realm, pounding hammers ring on pounded metal. Hidden deep in this realm's convoluted labyrinths, the palace of its ruling power(s) looms like a grim mountain of jagged black glass, attended by shadowy hooded figures speaking a near-forgotten Sumerian

dialect. The literally puzzling nature of the place intentionally deconstructs suppositions and misleads rational analysis. A Nephandus who manages to find her way through this trackless maze confronts the final door — often regarded as a titanic iron gate whose shifting dimensions make it painful to look at — and the forbidding specter of Neti, gatekeeper of the Abyss. And beyond that door waits...

#### Daath, the Returned Abyss

Once again, in the wide space between Gha'ag Sheblah and Satariel, the Abyss of Daath awaits the voyager. This time, though, instead of providing Nephandic initiation, it provides impediment to further travel. Just as the Abyss deconstructs the feeble mortal who entered the Caul, so now that same Abyss challenges a seasoned traveler in hell.

As noted earlier, Daath represents the gulf between the first seven Qlippoth and the attainment of the final three. Faced with the swirling vortex of oblivion, a Nephandus views her previous accomplishments as futile in the grand scheme of things. Whatever she has achieved thus far still pales to nothingness when confronted with the Abyss. This is the point where mortal power is revealed as empty vanity — the face of the endless cosmos where nothing a person can possibly accomplish *matters*. Many Fallen Ones can accept nihilism in an intellectual sense; confronting it once again, on its own terms, as a void between attainable feats and implacable cosmos, is an entirely different thing.

Crossing the Abyss is possible, of course – just difficult. Lightless tunnels connect Gha'ag Sheblah to Ghagiel, Golchab, and other Qlippoth. The expanse between Gha'ag Sheblah and Satariel, however, must be crossed not through tunnels but through an individual's courage when facing the Abyss. Governed by the demons Choronzon, Dweller of the Abyss, and Shugal, the Desert Fox, this expanse demands personal sacrifice and the bravery to fly through implacable darkness under one's own power. Accounts differ; every trip through the Abyss is said to be different. Some tales speak of shredding clouds of black sand, others of wading naked through shattered mirrors of black glass, and still others of plumbing crushing seas with a single breath of air. At some point of the journey, however, the Nephandus must bargain with Choronzon, Shugal, or unholy fusions of both. A successful bargain wins the keys to Satariel, and a refusal sends the magus back to her physical body, often battered physically and metaphysically from her failed confrontation the Abyss. Few voyagers, Nephandic or otherwise, manage to pass through to the next Qlipha. Those who do are formidable indeed.

#### 3: Satariel, the Concealers

The Throne of the Spider Goddess and the generative secret of the Dark Mother, the Qlipha Satariel waits on the other side of the Abyss. Associated with the Sphere of Mind, this Dominion represents the deepest of secrets and stickiest enigmas. Few human minds, even Awakened ones, can grasp the puzzles of Satariel; in

place of answers, this Qlipha offers shadows and entanglements, connected yet obscured and ultimately, by their nature, deadly.

Where other Qlippoth seem hostile, violent, and ominous, the realm of the Concealers feels *alien* — a place of incomprehensible networks of silence and sensation, shot through with hallucinogenic bursts too fleeting and indistinct to discern. Time reels in inconstant intervals. Voices and forms drift through ever-shifting landscapes of ruins and webs, catacombs and frontiers, storm-lashed moors and still-breathed caverns that seem like the innards of some titanic god-thing. The realm's inhabitants are almost inevitably fusions of human, animal, insect, and *other*. The mortal who beholds such mysteries has left earthly conception behind and begun a metamorphosis into something outside humanity.

Although the ruling power in Satariel is said to be Lucifuge, brother of Lucifer and "He Who Flees the Light," this Qlipha is most deeply associated with the dark feminine principle. Embodied by the Fates or the Norns; occasionally by Ereshkigal or her sister Inanna, who passed through the Underworld and now carries the seed of death within her; sometimes by Kali-Ma or Itzpapalotl the Obsidian Butterfly (detailed in Gods & Monsters, p. 158); and often in Qlippothic lore by Lilith herself, this feminine force reflects the Nightside shadow of the Sephiroth Binah ("Understanding"). Both Binah and Satariel are associated with consciousness, intuition, the womb and motherhood, and the color black. But where Binah represents the highest emanation of Shekhina, the feminine aspect of Divinity, Satariel reflects the ominous mysteries of womanhood: conception, birth, motherhood, and the ability to slay the life she has borne. In a typically Qlippothic twist of perversity, the conventional understanding of the shells places an intrinsically feminine emanation under theoretically male rulership. Certain authorities proclaim that's supposed to reflect Lucifuge as the masculine shadow in the feminine realm (or vice versa), while others view Lucifuge as an aspect of Crowley's "Great and Conquering Child," Horus, or even as a metaphysical embryo within the Great Mother's dark womb. Other commentators associate the Qlipha with Sheireil, "the Hairy Ones" or "the Goats of God" - satyr-like demons mentioned in Hebrew and Christian scripture. Who's to say? The apparent meaning of Satariel is "side(s) of god(s)," and so searching for definitive answers is as elusive as the Qlipha itself.

One fixture from accounts of Satariel remains consistent: The Throne of the Spider Goddess, a titanic glassine structure shaped from webs, bones, and various unnerving secretions. Here, a gargantuan incarnation of otherworldly arachnophobia holds court among a host of insectoid abominations. Is this a personification of the realm's dark mother, a child of that mother and Lucifuge, or something else? Satariel offers many questions and few, if any, answers. Rumor has it that the Goddess and her court have been known to devour errant travelers to this realm. If that's true, it would account for the explorers who attain this Qlipha and are never seen again.

Thanks to its associations with generative energies, some Nephandi associate Satariel with the Sphere of Prime instead of



Mind. The pulsating webs and coruscating energies suggest that connection. Then again, few things in a mage's world are cut and dried, and rigid distinctions are especially pointless beyond the Abyss.

#### 2: Ghagiel, the Hinderers

Where the mysterious web of secrets nurtures stillness and reflection, this pinnacle of aggression nurtures predatory activity. A Nephandus who attains this Qlipha wants to assault the world and violate creation. All Nephandi are predatory, but the magus who reaches Ghagiel considers everyone within reach to be her prey.

Translated as "those who go forth into the empty place of God," Ghagiel is a towering monument to transgression, filled with jagged spires, thick-rooted trees, and gigantic palaces thrusting towers at the dark red sky. A perpetual buzzing vibration fills the realm, celebrating its master Beelzebub, the Lord of the Flies and of "the festering world." Often envisioned as a monstrous fly king, a grotesque fusion of fly and man, or an immense fat man with horns, wings, and taloned hands, Beelzebub bears the rank of the highest demon-princes, second only to Satan... and by some reckonings, not even to him. (Again, demonology is not an exact science.) Whatever his formal power might be, this infernal lord represents the pinnacle of satanic manhood... which does not say flattering things about men. Beelzebub is infamous for his rage, savagery,

treachery and hunger. Moderation, to him, is weakness — the worst infernal sin.

Reigning sometimes as Beelzebub's rival and sometimes as his lieutenant, the archfiend Belial (sometimes known as Adam Belial, "the Wicked Man") commands the keys to this realm. Those keys, of course, are metaphorical, though some accounts describe them as massive iron keys as well. For the Nephandic explorer, Belial must be tricked, bribed or beaten out of those keys — he surrenders them voluntarily to no one save perhaps to Beelzebub and Lucifer himself. By those who meet him face to face, Belial is generally described as being far more human-like and subtle than Beelzebub; demons, however, are infamous tricksters and everyone encounters such entities quite differently.

Despite its manly temperament, though perhaps because some occultists view ephemera as metaphysical demon sperm. Fallen sources traditionally associate this Qlipha with the Spirit Sphere. As the inversion of *Chokmah*, the Sephiroth of Divine Wisdom, Ghagiel's energy is crafty but aggressive. The few voyagers who attain this Glipha assume the realm's conquering temperament. Regarded as the sphere of warlords and the seat of rebellion against the Almighty, Ghagiel has no use for cowards, weakness, doubt, or mercy.

#### I: Thaumiel, the Twin Gods

The pinnacle, or perhaps the nadir, of the Tree of Knowledge. Few voyagers ever reach it. Fewer still attain its powers. And those who manage to do both are never heard from again. Such is Nephandic Ascension, the ultimate Descent: Thaumiel, the throne of Lucifer and the cosmic revelation of the twin dark gods Moloch and Satan. To reach it is to triumph over every internal and external obstacle, to grind each taboo to dust, to prove one's self superior to mere humanity. At the Throne of Lucifer, a Qlippothic traveler is said to become a god herself. The gift of Lucifer unlocks the prison of mortal creation and opens the pathway to new universes wherein the Fallen one is supreme.

As the shadow of *Kether*, the transcendent Crown of Creation, Thaumiel represents the essence of ultimate attainment. In Kabbalistic tradition, Kether provides Unity... and so, of course, its dark opposite provides Division: two related but separate dimensions, one ruled by Satan, the other by Moloch. The consummate Adversary of God and Man embodies the Red Dragon, thief of fire and warlike manifestation of the most beautiful Fallen one of all, Lucifer; Moloch, bull-headed god of avarice and wealth, is the true form of the Golden Bull and the living furnace for innocent souls. To face down their demonic hordes and approach the pandimensional throne is to triumph over mortal weakness, fear, despair, principles, and even love. Only the most powerful Nephandi Oracles, the Aswadim, make it this far, and the ones who manage to seize the Throne and assume the Void in all its glory become deities of fresh and glorious hells.

With such attainment, a Nephandic God-Magus reputedly unlocks the 10th Sphere: The Absolute. With this legendary

Art, the lore insists, the traveler ends her quest with the power of a new Jehovah — not merely a shadow of divinity, or even a minor god, but a supreme creator, immortal and remote from the concerns of mere humanity. Whether or not this is true is — as with *all* things connected to the Qlippoth — debatable.

For certain Fallen, though, this is supposedly the ultimate goal: not to merely end the world as we know it, but to create new worlds to take its place, where the flawed one we know of never mattered at all.

That's the ideal, of course.

# The Black Diamond



As it does in the philosophies of most other kinds of mage, the Nephandic vision of Ascension takes two forms: The global consolidation, where all disparate aspects of Reality come together in a single unifying paradigm; and personal Ascension, where an individual mage transcends mortality and attains the perfection of his Path.

Global Descent, as we've seen earlier, involves the final death of Earth, its dominion

by Those Who Dwell Behind the Stars, and the final triumph of the Void. For personal Ascension, some Fallen aspire to the Black Diamond: Escape from the frailties of mortal life, ascension to self-divinity, and the birth of a new universe for which she becomes its Demiurge, creator, and tormenter of all life. For that latter goal, the magus claims the Throne of Lucifer, opens the Gates of Thaumiel, passes through the final crown, and celebrates the Consummation of Leviathan, wherein the Nephandus attains supremacy, not by bowing to a Dark Master but by becoming one herself.

Some authorities refer to this stage of perfection as the Black Diamond: A cosmic jewel of infinite perfections, its endless facets reflecting anti-light in the Absolute eternity of the Void. That Diamond's an illusion, of course... or a metaphor, or the closest shape a mortal mind can envision when attempting to conceive of something beyond human consciousness. What waits beyond Thaumiel is theoretical. Nephandic Aswadim have supposedly glimpsed it, perhaps held it in their eternal hands, but have not yet assumed its perfect form. Anyone who's seen this Diamond, though, much less attained its lightless grace, didn't stick around to offer details. For Nephandi, the Black Diamond and the new universes in its shape represent the ultimate Descent, Falling through the crevices in our world and creating a new cosmos where she becomes its god.

Certain advocates of Leviathan declare that a Fallen God may consume the false gods of our world and, by doing so, attain their power for himself. If that's true, though, then it hasn't happened yet... although the theory may explain why so many gods have disappeared, their cults forgotten and their achievements dust.

Just because it *hasn't* happened, though, doesn't mean it *can't*. Perhaps a Nephandic god with enough power and

infinite hunger actually *could* consume the gods of this world someday. And if so, that Fallen One's Ascension would meet both goals of the Nephandic ideal: Ultimate power, and ultimate Void.

In Mage terms, the Black Diamond and its possibilities reach beyond measurable terms. Although ultra-powerful Nephandi claim to have reached this stage, the Fallen lie about pretty much everything, so their claims are not exactly trustworthy. If by some chance a Nephandic character managed to Consummate Leviathan, then that character would become a hungry god... maybe one who's managed to slip back to our reality for an Apocalyptic snack—see the Chapter Seven section regarding metaplot options.

Until that catastrophic day, the Black Diamond and Consummation of Leviathan are just stories — tales that inspire Nephandic plots and quests, whisper at the edge of the Ascension War, and drive the few mages familiar with such tales to the desperate thought: "What if it is true?"

What if, indeed?

In the meantime, the Abyss echoes with dark possibilities. Void Engineers and Etherites report eerie phenomena in the Great Black beyond charted Umbral space. Titanic monsters occasionally appear, and the signals they send through endless emptiness sometimes sound, when recorded, like eldritch incantations and the names of Nephandic wizards long thought dead.

It may be true that Nephandic God-Magi rule distant and forsaken universes. Maybe the entities known as those who dwell behind the stars are Nephandic gods of such purity that the cosmos quivers in their shadows. It might even be true that one of those gods could unlock the final riddle beyond even that accomplishment and bring an end to the World of Darkness.

Who knows? Perhaps the World of Darkness is itself a creation of some malignant God-Mage, crafted to entertain its sovereign with the endless torment of the mortals trapped within its reach.

Maybe it's all just a game.

Of course not. That's absurd.

Isn't it?



# Chapter Five: And All the Powers of Hell

The Devil's most devilish when respectable.

- Elizabeth Barrett Browning

You know what the movies always get wrong about torture? I mean, besides the part where the victim is able to speak and walk and appear perfectly normal afterward except perhaps for a manly trickle of blood near the mouth and maybe black eye or two? It's the part where the good guys burst in just before things get really nasty, or where they cut away to a comforting exterior shot while disembodied screams echo on the soundtrack until the director estimates his audience has reached their point of peak endurance, at which point the film cuts away entirely and we leave the unfortunate victim to his fate while the truly important people reestablish a comfort zone so people won't have to feel too badly about what they chose to enjoy.

But you see, that won't happen here, I'm afraid. For you, there will be no cutaways, no cavalry to the rescue. You won't snarl bravely at me while I have some henchman punch you in the face a few times, and you certainly won't be walking away from here intact. Or at all, for that matter.

Even assuming someone knew you were here, which they don't, and that they could reach you, which they can't, I assure you that

by the time they arrived, all full of cute one-liners and nick-of-time salvation, you would be a shrieking pool of protoplasm that would never be recognizable as the one they'd come to save.

That is what's going to happen here, I'm afraid. You will become a shrieking pool of protoplasm, reduced to your component parts and wishing you had never been born and yet remaining unable to die.

That is the reality here. The one I craft for you out of our shared labors and your – my apologies – rather isolated pains.

This truly is the first moment of the rest of your life. It's just not going to be at all pleasant. You and I have all the time in the world, and I promise you this: Time moves quite differently here, and not, I'm sorry to say, in your favor.

Oh, who am I kidding here? I'm not at all sorry about that.

You, on the other hand? I suspect you probably will be. We've got big plans for your soul, and it needs twisting and turning before we pull it loose.

# Cruel Intentions

Black magick is simple, right? Scrawl some pentagrams on a wall in baby's blood, play some Black Metal albums, add a virgin or two, and you're ready to go.

Wrong.

Popular media portrays black magic as a pack of clichés wrapped around inverted Christian iconography and plenty of gratuitous nudity. While those clichés are rooted in the truth, those who practice the Black Arts understand that there's a lot more to infernal spellcraft than odd designs and virgin

# Magic or Magick?

Throughout this chapter, and the book in general, "black magic" refers to disreputable and exploitative occultism, while "black magick" refers to such practices when they're conducted through Awakening and the Spheres. Although the term "black magick" has become controversial in recent years (thanks to racist baggage), we use that phrase in its traditional connotation of malign intentions and "shadowy" behavior. No application of that term in this book is intended to convey any form of ethnic, racial or cultural slur.

sacrifices. As with any other mage, the Fallen and their kind practice esoteric belief systems with cogent (if malevolent) philosophies, coherent practices, and useful tools.

In Mage 20 terms, Nephandic characters focus their Sphere-based Effects through paradigms that support their beliefs, practices that turn those beliefs into action, and instruments that direct those practices toward the mage's desired results. And although those focus elements are as vicious as the Fallen themselves, they're rooted in the needs, cultures, and intentions of the mage who uses them.

Make no mistake: The Fallen are willfully, shamelessly, perhaps irrevocably evil. The Arts they practice inflict cruelty and ruin, with predatory intentions and the ultimate goal of bringing life as we know it to an end.

But those malevolent Arts make *sense*. They follow coherent (if implacable) paradigms, and employ practices and instruments with more substance than the one-dimensional stereotypes of moral-panic propaganda usually attributed to such vile rites.

And the would-be hero who underestimates the Fallen will find out the hard way just how effective the Dark Arts can be.

The following chapter explores the Nephandic approach to magick. For consistency's sake, it's presented in the same format as other Mage 20 treatments of focus, the Avatar, and so forth. That doesn't mean it's intended for player-character use. The following material is, by definition, malign. The consequences for using such magicks are severe, and we encourage Storytellers to restrict the following rule systems to non-player characters only.

So why, then, is it here?

Because knowing your enemy is half the battle — and because realizing that he's not just some one-dimensional jackass in a Hammer Studios costume makes him more fear-some than a horror-flick cliché.

For Storyteller guidance about crafting Nephandic characters, see "Building the Beast" in Chapter Seven, pp. XX-XX.

# Helpless?

Many of the following spells and items strip agency and consent from the characters on the receiving end. This sort of power has a name: *Rape*.

Do not vicariously rape your players.

Nephandi are horrifying not because they deal with demonic spirits but because they understand and exploit our inner demons. The powers detailed in the following chapter reflect that understanding and they ways in which the Fallen and their allies use it against people.

All the same, your players should always have an out if the story goes over their boundaries. That's especially true if the horrors in question involve psychological abuse and sexual violation. And so, the following powers should be used mostly against non-player characters, and against player characters only with the full and withdrawable consent of the players involved.

This means that a player who's feeling uncomfortable with the influence of a fictional character on his fictional counterpart can — and should — speak up and say, "Hey, I'm not cool with this." And if and when he does, the Storyteller must agree and find another way to deal with the situation: a blackout, a dramatic escape, whatever works best for your group and chronicle.

Players can, of course, consent to go along with whatever happens to their characters, even if that removes agency from the characters in question. The vital thing, though, is that the players retain agency and consent even if their characters do not. From a gaming standpoint, that consent may be withdrawn at any time, without argument from the Storyteller and other players. Sure, the Nephandus has five successes and the player botched his Willpower roll. "No" still means no.

A good Storyteller can work around a "no" and still tell a powerful, horrifying tale. In fact, the story can go further and remain entertaining when the players and the Storyteller all understand that they have the power to bail out if things stop being fun for them.

Helplessness is an integral element of horror. **Mage**, though, is a game, and games are supposed to be enjoyable for everyone involved. A certain loss of control kicks up the intensity of a storytelling game. Too much loss of control, however, leaves players feeling railroaded, not engaged. If that sense of helplessness hits too close to home, the game flips from play to trauma.

Don't go there. Not even in the name of horror.

For more details about limits, boundaries, and intense storytelling, see **Mage 20**, Chapter Seven (pp. 344-345) and "Dancing on the Knife's Edge" in this book (pp. XX-XX). For advice on running horror-based tales, see **The Book of Secrets**, pp. 283-284.

#### Hidden Knowledge

Most mages, unfortunately, *don't* know much about the Fallen. Even the ones who consider themselves knowledgeable, even skilled, at fighting Nephandi have very little clue about the way the Fallen operate. Those magickal rivals still hunt for tentacled monstrosities and aim their guns at gibbering pawns while the real Nephandi whisper behind their backs

and guide their aim at all the wrong people. Although a handful of characters might know a handful of secrets from this chapter — knowledge one gets *only* by purchasing a few dots in Lore (Nephandi) or learning it the hard way — most of the contents of this chapter are, unless otherwise noted, closely guarded secrets, not common knowledge to any mage outside their ranks.

# Nephandic Merits and Flaws



The Fallen Path has its perks and frailties, and although the majority of Merit and Flaw Traits possessed by Nephandic characters can be found in **The Book of Secrets** and **Mage 20**, Appendix II, a handful of such Traits can be found below as well.

On the whole, Nephandic characters tend to have Merits and Flaws related to their uncanny social prowess, unearthly good or terrible looks, cold-hearted deception and blazing

cruelty, and the innate but often charming perversity that makes them so frightfully tempting even as they lead you toward ruin. Nephandi who've been working that gig for decades or centuries boast prodigious Merits and unspeakable Flaws — the first to keep them alive, the second because no one can do the things they've done with that life unless it has marked them forever.

Because Nephandi (especially the really powerful ones) are supposed to be Storyteller-run antagonists, their Merits and Flaws can exceed the usual limits on such Traits. Point totals don't matter for such characters, of course, but the dramatic possibilities of a Nephandus with, say PTSD, Shy, Animal Magnetism, or either of the Red Tape Traits lends a bit of humanity to what might otherwise be a cardboard villain.

Unless a Storyteller rules otherwise, the following Traits belong *only* to Nephandic characters who have gone through the Cauls, and they come from that dreadful passage few mages experience and none return from as they once were.

## Shadow Appeal (3 pt. Supernatural Merit)

Every human animal has secrets even from himself. In time, those secrets form a repressed self — a shadow — that collects all the things that person doesn't want to recognize, either because they feel too awful to accept or too good to seem true. Thanks to their journeys through the shadow-side of existence, and the self-lacerating experiences they have in the process, many folks who've gone through the Cauls possess a frightening degree of insight about those shadows... and a fiendish gift for using those insights to their advantage.

Story-wise, this insight allows a Nephandus to notice weak spots in another person's psyche. Thus informed, she can exploit what she sees — flattering the egotist, undercutting the insecure,

flirting with the lonely, and so on. That insight makes her *very* good at exploiting people—so good, in fact, that they rarely notice her mind games until it's too late...if they ever notice them at all.

Rules-wise, this Merit subtracts -2 from the difficulty of a Nephandic character's rolls when she's trying to manipulate social situations through appeals to the shadow aspects of her prey. The specifics depend on the characters involved, and the Merit helps her puzzle out and then employ the most effective tactics for the job. This deduction can lower a difficulty beyond the usual -3 modifier limit, which gives the Fallen an inhuman edge gained from their awful journey through the Cauls.

Because this Merit reflects insights gained through Qlippothic Descent, it cannot be taken by characters who are not Caul-initiated Nephandi. The Trait adds an extra-sharp edge to Nephandic social tactics while showcasing the psychic insights of the Void.

For more information about the shadow, see "Jung's Long Shadow," p. XX.

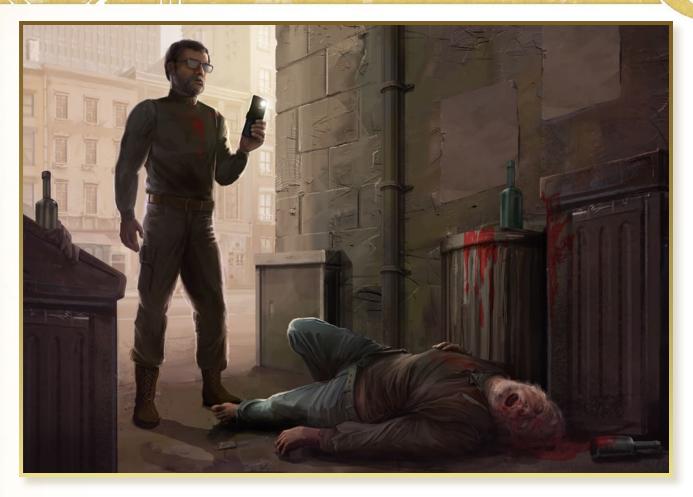
## Innocuous Aura (5 pt. Supernatural Merit)

Most Fallen mages have been marked by their travels through the Caul. One with this Merit has somehow escaped such deformations of the soul. Although she might alter her aura to conceal her true emotional state, she doesn't need to hide the flickers of Qlippothic essence in her aura because in her case they aren't there. This unearthly blessing makes her life a lot easier than it might be otherwise, and so Fallen Ones with the Merit make excellent deceivers, infiltrators, and double agents in places where Nephandi often cannot go.

# Abyssal Mastery (7 pt. Supernatural Merit)

In space, no one can survive for long...according to science, anyway. Those who revere the Void, of course, have other ideas. Even so, the ability to endure the cold vacuum of deep space and the deeper Umbra demands a certain level of preternatural mastery. One does not simply step out of the airlock and let darkness take its course. Such survival requires deep affinity with the broken Qlippothic shells and the cold darkness which waits beyond them.

Rules-wise, this Merit allows a Nephandus to pit herself against the rigors of deep space or the Deep Umbra with



nothing more than Qlippothic understanding and a smug grin. Although she'll still need some method of traveling the dizzying distances between celestial bodies, vehicles, and Realms, her body, mind, and soul may endure the Void without life-support gear. The Disembodiment phenomenon holds no terrors for her, either. No matter where she might roam or how long she remains apart from the earthly realm, this Nephandus retains her mortal form if and when she returns to Earth.

A Fallen character with this Merit can also use Spirit 5 to escape immediately into the Qlippoth — a feat few mages, even Masters, can successfully attempt, much less survive. Generally, the broken vessels can be reached only through the tunnels, a Caul, or some portal into the Qlipha of Lilith. This Merit allows the Nephandus to reach any Qlipha she has already attained.

As with nearly all of these Nephandic Traits, this Merit may be taken *only* by Fallen mages or, on account of their sublime madness, certain powerful Marauders whose sanity expands beyond earthly boundaries.

## Saint of the Pit (7 pt. Supernatural Merit)

She has gone where few others of her kind have gone and survived to speak of it. So terrible is this master of infernal

Realms that all but the most powerful malign entities defer to her commands. When she speaks, demons tremble and awful things obey. Even on the earthly plane, monsters know better than to mess with her.

Often combined with other Traits like Echoes, Primal Marks and Infamy, this Merit reflects the kind of rep that makes devils step-to. This rare human monster has gathered such respect that even earth-bound creatures have heard her name. Rules-wise, this Merit lowers the difficulty of all Social-based rolls by -3 whenever the Nephandus wants to compel obedience, drive a bargain, demand a favor, or scare the shit out of some infernal entity. The greatest arch-demons, totems, and foul godheads remain immune to this effect, though they'll probably give a lot of weight to the things she has to say. In the mortal realm, vampires, werecreatures, mages, and other monsters who're familiar with the darker side of the occult will at least have heard of this Fallen Saint; in game terms, any character with three dots or more in Occult, Lore (Nephandi), or Esoterica (demonology) has heard of this character. What they choose to do with that knowledge is up to them, but when you're dealing with someone this majestically evil, that response often involves getting the hell away from her before she decides to capture a new toy.

## Qlippothic Radiance (I-5 pt. Supernatural Flaw)

The Shells have left a discernable mark on a character who bears this Flaw. Unlike most Fallen Ones, that character cannot conceal her Qlippothic origins. Anyone who understands the nature of those sinister energies detects the marks of passage on her aura; other characters feel distinctly uncomfortable in her presence, even if they don't realize why.

Story-wise, this Flaw weaves threads of anti-light into the hues of the character's aura. Most Nephandi, when unshielded, display crackling flickers of blackness in their auras, but this radiance reveals a more severe condition. Those coruscating threads aren't merely dark, but an *absence of light* that witnesses can feel (and sometimes hear) even if they cannot see the aura themselves.

The severity of this Flaw depends upon the extent of the Fallen mage's travels into the Qlippoth. The further she has gone, the deeper and stronger this radiance becomes.

- (1 point) Faint traces of darkness that can be seen only by those who perceive auras.
- (2 points) Heavier veins of darkness, plus a minor wave of unease for people who cannot sense auras normally.
- (3 points) Pulsating throbs of anti-light in the aura, plus a distinct queasiness felt by those who can't see the aura itself.
- (4 points) Bolts of anti-light strobing through the aura, combined with an urge to leave the Fallen's presence as quickly as possible, plus a disconcerting sound of buzzing insects or whispering voices. (Adds one die to Intimidation rolls.)
- (5 points) An aura shot through with storms of anti-light, the sound of invisible insect swarms, and a presence that sends most thinking creatures cowering for escape. (Adds two dice to Intimidation rolls.)

A Nephandus who gains four or five points in this awful Flaw has journeyed past the void of Daath, reached toward the final three Qlipha, and achieved a truly frightening degree of power. No minor Nephandus manifests such unnerving degrees of Qlippothic essence, and so a mage with that level of radiance is a truly fearsome character.

## Spectral Presence (3 pt. Supernatural Flaw)

Passage through the Caul and Qlippoth has ripped this mage's physical form to shreds. Although he can be seen by mortal eyes, and can occasionally touch things in the material realm, this Nephandus exists largely in the Penumbra — an astral projection potent enough to retain an unstable manifestation in the everyday world.

Rules-wise, this Flaw renders the character semi-solid — visible but only vaguely tangible. To allow this character to affect the physical world with anything other than magick, the Storyteller must make a successful Willpower roll (difficulty 6 for normal activity, difficulty 8 for fine and careful manipulation). Each subsequent turn after the initial Willpower roll demands one point of Willpower spent in order to retain the focus needed to interact with the mortal world.

Visually, the Fallen One looks ghostly; his voice resonates with uncanny distance. In the Penumbra, the character appears and interacts normally with other characters. In order to affect him in the material world, however, an attacker must employ at least two dots in the Spheres of Entropy, Mind, Prime, Spirit, or Time. Raw physical forces and materials go right through him otherwise, and while this might seem like a good thing, the Nephandus remains isolated from physical sensations unless he manages to exert his will long enough to feel something tangible. Oh, he can see, and hear, but the sensations of physical touch, taste, and smell are lost to him. Worst of all, he feels the desire for food and drink, but cannot – unless he manages to focus his will long enough to consume some, or else finds spiritual food instead — indulge that desire. He no longer truly needs physical nutrition but that won't stop him from craving it.

As with other Nephandic Merits and Flaws, this Trait comes from the essence of Descent, and cannot be purchased for non-Fallen characters.

## Abyssal Lunatic (5 pt. Supernatural Flaw)

This Nephandus went too far. Perhaps it was the tides beyond the Caul, or the stress of navigating the forbidden shells and their awful entities. Maybe he spent too much time beyond the Gauntlet but retains his physical form. Whatever the reasons, his rightful mind has fled, leaving mental wreckage with inhuman powers and insights too grotesque to convey through rational means.

In game terms, this ravaged soul hasn't broken through to Marauder-like madness, nor is he snared in a state of Quiet, or mentally ill in the normal sense of that term. Torn by his Abyssal pursuits, he's an irrational, incoherent mess — still a mage, but one who hasn't shaken hands with functional sanity in ages. Instead, he mutters, raves, tears his clothing, rips out his hair, howls at the stars, and generally behaves more like the archetypal scary madman than like someone with an actual — and potentially treatable — mental illness. Ravaged by paranormal lunacy, he embodies the shrieking irrationality of the Void.

Game-wise, this Flaw renders the character unplayable in any normal way, and so it's reserved for Storyteller characters only. At this degree of unfathomable madness, he's essentially unsalvageable; even Masters of the Mind Sphere can't put this eggshell consciousness back together again.

# Widderslante, or Taint of Corruption (7 pt. Supernatural Flaw)

Born with a Nephandic soul from a previous incarnation, the potential Nephandus struggles with the urge to Fall. That conflict between the Qlippothic soul stain and the change to get things right this time around colors every element of the character's existence. From childhood until death, the Cauls beckon her. Although she can pursue any Path in this life, the dread gravity of another Fall pulls her toward the ecstasy of damnation.

In game terms, this is the Flaw Taint of Corruption (detailed in **The Book of Secrets**, p. 96), defined specifically as Nephandic heritage. Unlike the other Merits and Flaws in this section, this Trait may be taken by a character who has not Fallen...yet.

# Infernal Investments



The legacy of Dr. Faustus continues to haunt the magickal world. Despite dreadful punishments and assured damnation, people still make pacts with demonic entities in order to get things that seem beyond a mortal's grasp. Why? All sorts of reasons: power, fun, fury, despair, the lack of belief in one's immortal soul, hatred, greed, pride, depression, curiosity... the smorgasbord of human frailties leads to a hunger for oblivion that malignant Umbral

entities are all-too willing to provide. Hence the *pact* — that *Foederis Infernus* that seals an exchange of services between a mortal and his demonic Patronus, trading sins and ruin for power on the Earthly realm.

Traditionally, an Infernal pact begins when a human calls upon some devilish entity and offers to trade services for favors. Despite folklore, those pacts don't usually start with soul selling; the person who agrees to that condition right off the bat is a very bad negotiator. Instead, the summoner requests certain levels of power in exchange for certain levels of depravity. In return, the entity literally "invests" a bit of power in its mortal pawn. The "patron" gets an agent on the human world, and that agent gets a handful of goodies, courtesy of an Otherworldly malefactor. From that point onward, the mortal slides into a whirlpool of iniquities, causing pain to other people as he double-damns himself through the pact he signed and the deeds he performs. By the time he actually sells his soul, he's usually so far in debt that this final promise is a formality. Still, there's a difference between having a mortal go to a hell and getting that mortal condemned to your personal corner of hell. And considering the vast number of hells and demonic entities out there, such distinctions actually do matter.

True Nephandi, contrary to popular misconception, don't often resort to such pacts. The quest for personal power is an intrinsic element of their Path, and so while they can and do call upon the darkest of Umbral powers upon occasion, the servile nature of infernal pacts runs counter to the Nephandic approach. Begging favors from a more-powerful party than yourself, in exchange for giving that entity even more power over you, is an abject display of weakness. Given the traditional

interpretation of their name — "the Eaters of the Weak" — Nephandi rarely assume such bargains with infernal powers.

Their pawns and associates, on the other hand, often do.

And so, while an Awakened Nephandus slings her Sphere-based Arts, the cultist at her side (or on her payroll) may have an array of hell-given gifts: wealth, inhuman beauty, an immunity to pain, and so forth. Those dark blessings provide a much-needed edge to such associates, especially if (and when) they find themselves facing an angry Black Suit or a wizard determined to see them purged from this earth.

The major exception to this rule involves the quest for Goetic knowledge. For while Nephandic mages prefer to rely upon their own Enlightenment for their mystic Arts, it's quite traditional – especially in Goetia and demonology – to summon certain demons in order to pick their brains on a given subject. Story-wise, a Fallen mage may well conjure up Asmodeus, ask him some questions about complex mathematical principles, and then set him free with a small promise to reward the demon for his time. In game terms, the character invokes the demon, offers a minor pact (Level 1 or 2 on the chart below), and gains a dot or two of the Knowledge Science (Mathematics). That sort of deal is perfectly acceptable under the Nephandic law of personal empowerment, in part because the ability to summon an archfiend and then get him to give you math lessons displays an admirable amount of fortitude... and that, among the Fallen, is anything but weak.

## Optional Rule: Infernal Pacts

Game-wise, an Infernal pact gives a certain number of freebie points to a character in exchange for that character's servitude to a malignant spirit entity. The exact *nature* of that entity is the Storyteller's call, and it may remain a secret from both the character and his player. Whatever sort of "demon" it may be, however, it demands some pretty evil stuff from its mortal pawn. Large numbers of points require significantly sinful activities...which, in turn, erode the conscience of the demon servant while deepening his lust for greater powers, which, of course, inspires him to deeper wells of sin. And because the idea of having players perform atrocities for character points is fairly wretched, the Infernal pact concept remains an *optional rule* that your group can use or discard.

Each Pact Rating Level confers an equal number of freebie points; a Level 5 pact, for instance, confers five freebie points to a soul-bound character. Pacts of nine points or less can be made as many times as the Infernalist can fulfill them — the demon hands her pawn a shovel and lets him dig that grave as deep as he's willing to go. Those points can be spent on Backgrounds, Advantages, or any other sort of Trait the Storyteller allows an Infernalist to buy. Again, this is *seriously* warped behavior, so we don't endorse it as a player-character option. However, for supporting characters (Nephandic or otherwise), a series of Infernal pacts can turn an unAwakened mortal into a threat for your Awakened cabal.

On that note: A mage who gains character points through an Infernal pact cannot spend those points on Arete or Spheres. Such powers come from internal understanding and discipline, not from gifts bestowed by demonic critters. Even if the character believes that her powers flow from infernal forces (see "Nephandic Paradigms," pp. XX-XX), pact points can't purchase the gifts of Awakening.

#### Level 1: Malice

The pawn agrees to commit minor sins (theft, slander, assault, etc.) in exchange for one point of power.

#### Level 2: Cruelty

The Patronus expects her devotee to perform acts of mortal torment, injury, and perhaps murder.

#### Level 3: Immorality

An "immoral" pact demands extreme cruelty, aberrant lusts, and the painful sacrifice of living things.

#### Level 4: Wrongdoing

The agent of evil becomes an active force for large-scale malignancy.

#### Level 5: Corruption

Malignance gives way to corruption as the devotee leads other people into whirlpools of sin.

#### Level 6: Mortal Sin

The devotee becomes a cult leader, undermining righteous organizations while spreading corruption on a grand scale.

#### Level 7: Heresy

Dedicated to the constant pursuit of evil, the devotee destroys faith and commits depraved sins — usually from behind a façade of righteousness.

#### Level 8: Grand Evil

Supported by his Patronus, the hardcore sinner works to destroy cities, creeds, and nations, often as a warlord, celebrity, corporate tyrant, or career politician.

#### Level 9: Life-Bond

Sworn to a lifetime of service, the sinner indulges in every form of vice and cruelty he can commit in his Patron's name

#### Level 10: Soul-Pact

The most extreme form of loyalty involves a lifetime of decadent service, followed by damnation in the Patron's name after death finally ends the game. Once this bargain has been struck, no other form of pact is possible. Whether or not such a hellbound soul can achieve salvation at that point is a matter for gods, not men.

# Investment Traits

Infernal favors come in many different kinds. Through them, a soul-bound character might obtain physical power, social graces, money, property, good looks, or inhuman abilities. The greatest limitations on such benefits are the powers of the entity in question, its desire to give such blessings to a sniveling mortal, and — in game terms — the number of points the Storyteller is willing to let a character have in order to mortgage those demonic gifts with his soul as collateral.

Rules-wise, a character could theoretically purchase any Merit, Background, or Special Advantage permitted by the Storyteller as a demonic Investment. Because Goetic lore asserts that demons may confer knowledge on mortals who petition them successfully, a sufficiently powerful demon might confer a few dots in certain Knowledge Traits as Investments — as with, for example, Occult Awareness, below; essentially, the demonic Patron teaches that Knowledge to the pawn. Those infernal gifts ought to fit the nature of the being who bestows them, of course; it's not likely that a Goetic patron of pestilence would confer the Merit: Spark of Life upon his favored pawn, although he might make her Too Tough to Die instead.

Whatever powers or favors the Investment involves, the Patron will be sure to give it some ironic twist: an "Immortal" pawn might suffer excruciating pain and scarring from her injuries; one who's Too Tough to Die could lose all sensitivities to *pleasurable* sensations, too. Demons are, by nature, malevolent. No matter how generous one might appear, or how polite one may behave, their ultimate motivations involve suffering, corruption, and a cruel sense of humor.

In addition to those Backgrounds, Merits, Knowledges, and Special Advantages, the list below includes a few powers specifically drawn from infernal sources. In game terms, these Investment Traits are essentially Special Advantages or Supernatural Merits which confer inhuman powers in exchange for character points. Their nature, however, is specifically malign. There's nothing "neutral" about either the powers or their sources, and so possessing them (or, more accurately, being possessed by them) marks the character as a sinner of the vilest kind.

# **Demonic Investment Flaws**

From a Flaws standpoint, a character with infernal Investments also receives the Flaw: *Bound*. That character does not receive additional points for that Trait, though — it's just the nature of the beast, so to speak.

An Invested character is also likely to have one or more of the following Flaws; in this case, the Flaws will reflect additional side effects of the soul-pact, and the character should receive points for having them: Aging, Beast Within, Bedeviled, Bizarre Hunger, Cast No Shadow or Reflection, Catspaw, Cursed, Dark Fate, Dark Secret, Degeneration, Devil's Mark, Diabolical Mentor (if the character has gained knowledge from the demon), Echoes, Haunted, Horrific, Icy, Mayfly Curse (fairly common among deeply Invested devil pawns), Monstrous, Nightmares, Obsession (the pawn's forthcoming damnation), Permanent Wound, Primal Marks, Psychic Vampire, Repulsive Feature, Strangeness, Taint of Corruption, Uncanny, or Vulnerability (typically to holy objects, prayers, and so forth).

In both cases, those additional Flaws can exceed the usual seven-point limit normally placed on the amount of Flaw-based points a single character can take. Thus, a character with such powers can achieve impressive power at a catastrophic price in both this world and the next.

A character need not be a mage in order to receive demonic Investments. Traditionally, such powers are requested by people who lack blessings like True Magick and other uncanny powers. Even so, as the not-especially good doctor's legend shows, people with substantial mystic prowess often crave more, regardless of the cost. And so, in game terms, demonic Investments are available to any character — Awakened or not, Nephandus or otherwise — your Storyteller allows to make such deals.

In addition to the various Merits, Backgrounds, Knowledges, and Special Advantages that may be granted by infernal entities, the following Investments might reward a pact and confer power at a literally hellish cost. Because these are "static" powers conferred by demonic forces, not the flexible gifts of True Magick, these Investments are not subject to Paradox. That said, such gifts bear the mark of Infernal Resonance. The average person probably won't notice it, but a character familiar with the metaphysical world could note the Invested one's tainted aura, "the scent of the Wyrm," and other hints of Otherworldly corruption.

Such powers often falter, too, in the face of religious magick from forces and people dedicated to cosmic goodness. Although the cynical nature of the modern world doesn't confer the old immunities that faithful clerics and the like would often receive when facing demon-haunted pawns, the True Faith Merit, angelic powers, and the magicks of Awakened Choristers, Batini, Templars, and the like often seem (Storyteller's option) to have a bit more effect against mortals Invested with demonic energies.

Unless otherwise noted, an Investment allows the soulbound character to employ her power at will. Such powers do not alter reality the way Spheres do, and so they are not subject to Paradox. Though usually associated with "classical" demons of the Western occult tradition, Investments may be granted by malign gods or other strange entities with significant mystic power...like perhaps memetic entities like Baphomet or Basilisk.

You might notice that the character points involved seem a little bit off — sometimes too low for a powerful ability, sometimes a bit high for something which seems like a vanity indulgence. That's the funny thing with demonic bargains: The cost-benefit ratio errs on the side of disorder, not balance. Demons make bargains they feel will benefit their goals, not the goals of mortal petitioners. And if a mortal is willing to pay a high price for very little reward? Hey, who's a demon to tell the poor sucker otherwise?

#### Service (I+ pt. Investment)

By serving the Abyss, a mortal may purchase a limited service from those whom the Abyss commands. Through this Investment, a petitioner may earn a certain degree of loyalty from a lesser entity. Upon the completion of the pact's terms, this servant appears at her new master's side. Although the introductory address from such servants — "Master, what is thy will!" — has changed a bit over the centuries, many servants, demons, and new-sworn petitioners still prefer to use the old greeting. In such matters, of course, tradition matters.

The power of this servant depends upon the points spent on the Investment:

- (1 point) A single mortal human or animal pawn with some skills but no paranormal powers.
- (2 points) A minor demonic "host-beast," like a fomor, black wind or demonhound.
- (3 points) A minor servitor demon, like an imp or a succubus.

This servant's prime duty, of course, involves serving the needs of chaos and damnation, not necessarily the whims of some Invested human "master." So long as the petitioner's aims concur with this infernal duty, the servant remains loyal unto its material death. Minor demons, of course, do not actually "die" in a material sense; the destruction of their physical forms merely banish them to the hell from which they came. Immortal creatures, though, have very long memories, and a mortal "master" who abuses his demonic servant may find himself, upon his own death, on the receiving end of an ugly hell-spawned grudge.

# Moth into Flame (2 pt. Investment)

We crave what we know we should not have. Some folks excel at talking us into those things even when we know better than to listen...are so good at it, in fact, that we find ourselves at the end of blurry recollections wondering how in the hell we got where we are now. The average tempter relies upon natural charm and refined skills to become so convincing. Some people, though, have neither the gift nor



the patience... and since infernal pacts are all about taking shortcuts, this subtle-yet-life-destroying Investment grants the would-be tempter the gift of inhuman persuasive powers.

Simply by holding a conversation with the subject of his attention, the petitioner can probably convince her to act out deeply repressed impulses and fantasies. Those urges must be rooted in her actual desires — this Investment overcomes internal reluctance and self-preservation. Once engaged, however, those desires run riot. Fuck the boss, whether he wants you to or not? Okay, sure. Shoot that damn neighbor? In a heartbeat! Smash your kid's brains against the wall? Well, maybe you can finally get some goddamned sleep without that brat screaming all the time. The flame is lit, the moth flies in, and eventually everything burns.

Rules-wise, the tempter and his "moth" share an extended and resisted series of rolls, as per Mage 20, pp. 390-391. The Tempter uses Occult + an appropriate Social or Mental Trait; the handsome tempter might employ Appearance to urge his target toward catastrophe, while a clever one spots her psychological weaknesses with Perception or tears down her arguments with Intelligence. The victim counters with Willpower, and each success of hers takes one of his successes away. The difficulty for both rolls is 7, and the number of successes depends upon what the tempter is trying to get convince his "moth" to do:

Successes	Deed is
Three	Something the target wants to do anyway.
Four	Something they resist doing even though they want to.
Five	Something that might destroy their life.
Six+	Something that <i>would</i> destroy their life, and other lives as well.

The tempter gets three tries; after that, the persuasions start to lose potency. If he fails a roll, his victim gets wise and breaks the conversation off... for now, anyway, though he can try again later. If he botches, the "moth" sees right through him and breaks off contact for good.

Because so many modern conversations involve virtual media, the tempter can light his "flame" through any form of interactive contact: text messages, instant messaging, phone conversations, video conferencing, and so forth. Thanks to the limitations of this Investment, however, and the personal nature of the temptations, this power works on only one victim at a time.

# Hellfire (3+ pt. Investment)

A faceful of flames makes a great opening statement. Thus, a devilish Patron can bestow upon her favored mortals the ultimate in-your-face power: *Fire*.

The fire itself takes many forms, most of which depend upon the infernal Patron and the gift she decides to bestow on her human servitor. A sheet of flames bursting from one's fingertips? A gout of pitch-black cold fire vomited forth from the Invested one's gullet? A handful of pulsating hot plasma tossed by a laughing Infernalist? All possible. Given the demon and her "very good friend," the attack could manifest instead as blistering cold, acid, lightning, and so forth. The result is always the same, though: some asshole hurling a blast of stuff that burns, usually in a direction that creates an enjoyable sense of chaos.

Rules-wise, the three-point version of this Investment inflicts three levels of aggravated fire damage, as detailed in **Mage 20**, p. 436 and p. 454. The target can try to soak that damage for a lesser burn, but given the fire's supernatural nature, the difficulty of that soak roll is 9. For every two additional points, the infernalist adds one more health level to that damage.

Fortunately, the flame-throwing character must first hit his target Dexterity + Occult, difficulty 5, and the would-be victim can try to block or dodge that flame in the usual ways. Dodging this hellfire, of course, doesn't mean the flames have no effect. Things that *can* burn probably *will* burn (or freeze, shatter, disintegrate, etc.) when this elemental blast hits them. To hell with subtlety—full burn ahead!

#### Inhuman Attributes (3+ pt. Investment)

Wouldn't you love to be stronger than Conan? Hotter than Helen of Troy? So tough that a Special Forces squad can't take you down? Lots of folks would sell their souls for such attributes...and many of them do. Rumor has it that many celebrities have done just that — and in Nephandic circles, such gifts are easy to secure if you're willing to pay the price.

Every three points invested in this Investment buys one additional dot in an Attribute Trait. Those Traits can be boosted to inhuman levels, up to a maximum of 8. Each "raise," however, demands a new pact: If pop singer Miri Solaris strikes a pact that makes her uncannily gorgeous (raising her Appearance from 3 to 6), and wants to become more beautiful still, she needs to have a chat with her infernal assistant... and that new deal will cost her plenty more.

For the most part, these new Traits last until the person who makes that pact dies...although given the precarious nature of such bargains, that death may come sooner rather than later. Under certain circumstances, expressions of True Faith or gods-given magic(k) might reveal the artificial nature of that person's strength or beauty. Even without such revelations, there's something decidedly "off" about people with demon-enhanced gifts. Sure, that person might be incredibly smart, strong, or beautiful, but she's kind of eerie too.

For a magickal variation on this Investment, see the spell **Beautify or Deform**, below.

# Luciferian Charm (4 pt. Investment)

Who can resist the Devil's wiles? Not many people when confronted with the full force of this charisma-bomb

Investment. No matter how the holder of this demonic power acts, her actions seem enchanting and marvelously fun. Folks view whatever this person does in the most favorable light, and they'll make excuses for even the most inexcusable activities. Stole from her parents? Doesn't *everyone*? She beat her girlfriend? That bitch had it coming. Shot that guy right in front of witnesses? There must be some reasonable explanation — and it was probably *his* fault anyway. Given the amount of leeway granted to modern celebrities, cops, and politicians, this may be the most common demonic Investment around.

Rules-wise, the holder of this Investment has a difficulty of 4 when using any sort of Social-Traits roll. People tend to take her side in a dispute, and they'll come along for the party whenever she suggests some fun. Unlike the Innocence Merit, it's not that folks don't believe such things could possibly come from the charmer in question — it's that she makes sin seem too enticing to resist.

#### Occult Awareness (4 pt. Investment)

"I wish to know," the petitioner says. "Know what?" the demon replies. "Everything," says the mortal... and so it is, and now he'll have to live with that knowledge. This Investment bestows an instant, sanity-quaking burst of forbidden knowledge. When the rush subsides, that trembling mortal holds possession of dark secrets and horrible truths.

From a rules standpoint, Occult Awareness confers three dots each in the Occult Knowledge, the Awareness Talent, and Esoterica (Forbidden Secrets). If that character already has several dots in those Traits, the Investment adds three more, up to a maximum of five dots per Trait. Naturally, there's a catch: This blast of awful insight forces the player (or Storyteller, for an NPC) to make a Willpower roll, difficulty 7, on that character's behalf. If he wins, he retains his previous degree of sanity; if he fails, the character goes slightly insane and receives three points in the Derangement Flaw. If the roll comes up a botch, the character suffers from Things Man Was Not Meant to Know, and he remains somewhat insane forever afterward.

# Search and Find (4 pt. Investment)

Demons are good at finding things. *Really* good at finding things. And so, with a sufficient blessing from an infernal Patron, an Invested petitioner stands a decent chance at locating lost items or secret treasures...assuming, of course, that she knows more or less what she's looking for to begin with.

By smearing a tiny pool of black ink into her palm, and then calling upon her Patron to aid her, the petitioner employs this Investment to request a clue to the hidden item's location. The demon writes the clue in the ink on her palm, and that clue will most likely be accurate. Of course, the petitioner still needs to puzzle out what that clue actually means, and because the clue tends to be written in a "traditionally occult" non-English language (Latin, Hebrew, Sanskrit, etc.) or an esoteric one (Enochian, the "Witches Alphabet," alchemical symbols, and the like), that's a lot harder than it sounds.

Rules-wise, the Investment grants the character a chance to find the desired object if she manages to make a successful Perception + Enigmas roll. That roll's difficulty depends upon whether or not she has the capacity to understand the clue at all, with a moderate difficulty if she can, and an exceedingly high one if she lacks the linguistic or cultural knowledge to puzzle it out through anything other than a hunch. Although the clue itself will be accurate, the exact parameters of the clue and the character's ability to reach the goal once she figures out the clue is left to the Storyteller's discretion, with the caveat that demons tend to share an ironic sense of humor.

#### Edge of Agreement (5 pt. Investment)

We all want that special something that makes an argument damn near unbeatable. With this Investment, the infernal petitioner receives an edge for personal and virtual debates. No matter what falsehoods he states or what absurdities he declares, the character manages to sound convincing on at least a surface level.

In game terms, the Invested character's pronouncements come across as reasonable and well-considered unless a person reading or listening to them decides to think critically about what's being said. If she does that, the doubtful character can make a Willpower roll to recognize that the argument is bull-shit. The difficulty of that roll depends on how unreasonable it sounds to her; absurd or abhorrent declarations are pretty easy to penetrate (difficulty 5), while apparently logical ones, or arguments that suit her preconceptions, are much harder to dismantle (difficulty 8 or higher). Even if that doubting character manages to see through the argument, of course, other people aren't likely to agree with her. The doubting character may find herself beating her head against a wall of nonsense that no one else seems to recognize for what it is.

Because this power comes from the influence and intervention of malignant spirits, this Investment may not be taken as any other form of Trait (a Merit, a Special Advantage, etc.), and remains available only to characters who've made deals with demonic entities.

# All-Access Pass (6 pt. Investment)

Today's world is all about access: clubs, banks, concerts, tech and military installations, secret parties, private soirees... the right person can just waltz right in, while the rest of us poor slobs wait in line or never even get access to those halls of power. Well, demons are traditionally all *about* unfettered access to forbidden things, and so this Investment gets the holder through the door at any event or installation she wishes to attend.

Simply by appearing at the door and speaking to the gatekeepers, this VIP can enter and leave any exclusive party or location of her choice. This Investment won't unlock literal gates or security systems, of course (that's a separate Investment), but as far as human and not-quite human keepers are concerned, this person has every right to be where she is, wherever and whenever she wishes to be there.

Being a demonic Investment, of course, this favor may be withdrawn at any time if the holder of the "pass" reneges on her deal or pisses off the demonic Patron. The consequences for becoming suddenly unwelcome in certain establishments can be unfortunate.

#### Infernal Key (6 pt. Investment)

Demons, it is known, are masters of opening locks. With this traditional favor (known in the old days as *Bond-Breaking*), the infernal debtor can spring locks, undo knots, pop handcuffs, shed chains, open jail doors, and otherwise escape confinement or access locked areas which have been secured with mechanical or otherwise mechanical locks.

To undo the fastenings with this "infernal key," the Invested one whispers a devilish incantation, strokes his fingers against the lock (or other surface to be opened), and invokes the power of his demonic patron. Rules-wise, the Storyteller rolls that character's Manipulation + Occult against difficulty 7; a single success opens most locks, though especially complex ones might require three or more.

Although this Investment can spring mechanical locks guided by electronic impulses (like, say, the average prison door), it cannot affect fully electronic security systems (like the ignition systems of certain modern vehicles). Demons *are* rather traditional, after all, and most of them have not quite embraced the finer points of modern technology.

#### Shameful Sight (6 pt. Investment)

There are none innocent, as St. Paul said. No, not one. And so, this demonic gift allows the Invested pawn to spot and expose secret sins. Gazing into a person's eyes, the demonic petitioner may see the most shameful deeds his target recalls performing... and with a whispered invocation and a mirrored surface, he can reveal that deed to other people while appearing blameless himself.

Story-wise, the character must successfully penetrate his target's will in order to expose the sin. Rules-wise, a successful Perception + Occult reveals that sin to the Infernalist. The difficulty for the roll is the target's Willpower Trait, which makes this an especially easy blessing to employ. Sins which haunt the target's mind may be seen and exposed with a success or two; deeply hidden or near-forgotten deeds demand five successes or more, and the Investment cannot reveal a deed the sinner has forgotten.

Once he knows about the sin in question, the petitioner can do whatever he likes with that information. Blackmail? Leverage? Immediate and public exposure? The choice is his to decide.

If he opts to reveal the shameful deed for everyone to see, the Invested one can speak a brief invocation to the demon who gifted him with this insight. Within seconds, a scene of the sinful moment appears on a reflective surface nearby: a mirror, a pool of water, a shiny plate, and so forth. And although "traditional" demons have not quite mastered the art of creating videos just yet, an enterprising Infernalist can

set up a camera, record the projected scene, and then post that video on the internet, message it on his phone, or employ other media that spreads the shameful sight far and wide.

## Object of Affection (7 pt. Investment)

"I'd sell my soul to have his love!" Oh, would you now? This Investment furnishes the petitioner with the devotion of a person they supposedly love. That "object of affection" is essentially enslaved by the demon and handed over to the pawn, to do with as she will. If she thinks, however, that her "object" loves her back, she's wrong. At best, he'll be a shadow of his usual self – a person captivated by infernal influence and forced to serve as the plaything of a lusting rapist. And make no mistake — this captivation is rape, both of the body and of the soul. Although the infernal bargainer might perceive her feelings as "affection," this Investment rewards her instead with a person who wants nothing to do with her, and yet who is forced to mimic something resembling desire because a demon has possessed him and literally driven that "object" into the arms (and bed) of the one who bargained to have him. Unless the demon's command is broken by some act of faith or magic(k), this Investment binds the "object" to his "beloved" unto death. This "gift" might seem like a love story; in reality, though, it's tragic horror.

# Prosecutorial Immunity (7 pt. Investment)

Criminal charges just seem to slide off of some people. This Investment explains why. A character with this demonic favor remains immune to conviction; he might be arrested, get charged, perhaps wind up in court but sooner or later some

quirk of procedure sets him free. The evidence disappears, witnesses die without discernable ties to the defendant, the judge has an affair with the defense attorney, the cops like the guy too much to want to see him do time... whatever the reason, the Invested one soon dances away from all charges and remains a free man. Whatever he might do, the courts cannot touch him. The Investment will not, of course, protect him from extrajudicial harm (vigilante justice, vengeful loved ones, betrayal by colleagues, etc.), although many folks who appear immune to the wheels of justice seem to think it will. In game terms, this Investment is a story element that allows the character to skip free of legal entanglements and escape punishment by human law enforcement if not by higher (or lower) kinds of authority.

#### Mammon's Gift (8 pt. Investment)

Blessed by the demon prince of wealth, the infernal petitioner has a literal golden touch. One per night (not during daylight hours at that person's location), the pawn may turn one small piece of inert, inanimate matter (that is, not a vampire) into gold. The resulting gold bears a distinctly infernal taint and Resonance; people who can sense such things instantly recognize its demonic source. Even so, gold is gold, and most folks don't care where it came from so long as it's worth money.

In the old days, the weight of objects that could be turned so easily into gold topped out at 13 pounds (5.9 kg). Given the current value of gold on the modern marketplace, that maximum weight is now 13 *ounces* (0.37 kg) instead. Inflation, you know. Still, considering that current values place gold at



over \$1,000 per ounce, this Investment is still worth selling one's soul for.

To access Mammon's Gift, the Invested character whispers a soft prayer to Mammon and then strokes a fingertip across the object she wants to turn into gold. Larger or heavier objects simply will not transform. Once golden, the object remains golden for 13 days, and then returns to its previous state. Thus, the Invested person must use it or lose it.

#### Media Bomb (8 pts.)

Spiritual puritans have claimed for ages that mass media — books, games, theater, music, films, and so forth — distract the soul and give corruption room to grow. Those assertions aren't always wrong. With this devilish edge, a person can use mass media to spread libertine messages and hateful propaganda. Audiences who witness it find themselves inclined toward things they wouldn't normally consider, yet they resist the idea that the media itself could possibly be at fault. This is not mind control, per se, but something far more insidious: A deep-seated influence that tugs at the darker elements of the collective psyche and unravels the bonds of civil behavior and society.

Rules-wise, the Invested artist creates the work in question, using the appropriate Traits (Art, Expression, Computer, Mass Media, etc.). While doing so, she focuses malign intent into the play, book, video, or other medium. Invoking the power of her demonic collaborator, the artist tailors her work to suit a disruptive agenda — riots, maybe, or an increased interest in drugs or violent attacks on certain types of people;

the news is full of such events, and the internet seethes with accusations that pundits and celebrities are to blame for the carnage. The creative process involves extended rolls and the more successful the rolls are, the more socially disruptive the long-term effects of the media creation will be.

Each "media bomb" involves a separate creative process and series of rolls. The large-scale effects of a media bomb are left to the Storyteller to determine, but they'll be subtle, pervasive, controversial, and intrinsically destructive.

For an Awakened Nephandic version of this Investment, see Rile the Herd, p. XX.

#### Regeneration (9 pt. Investment)

How does that cultist get shot three times and come back for more? Maybe it's because she struck a bargain with her infernal Patron and received the gift of unnatural healing. With a mere effort of will, that infernal debtor can heal all wounds — bashing, lethal, and aggravated — within seconds unless, of course, those wounds were caused by an agent of divine forces who's been schooled in the techniques of battling demonic influence.

In system terms, this Investment allows a character to heal one health level of damage by spending a point of Willpower to do so. A few exceptions to this gift, however, exist: wounds caused by Prime Sphere Effects, damage inflicted by someone with True Faith, and spells cast by members of the Celestial Chorus, Ahl-i-Batin, and Templar Knights — mages whose training allows them to work around this hell-spawned gift.

# Malevolent Focus



Although the Maleficia practice (see Mage 20, pp. 579-580) is a universal constant among Nephandi, the Fallen employ a wide variety of beliefs, practices, and tools. *Barabbi* use malignant variations on their original focus, while mages who pursue twisted practices from the get-go use whichever focus fits their nature most.

For the most part, Nephandic characters use the same sorts of paradigms, practices,

and instruments that any other mage employs. Many of those focus elements can be found in Mage 20, Chapter Ten, and The Book of Secrets, Chapter Three; various new ones, however, are detailed below. These malign creeds and tools are not exclusive to the Fallen Ones, or to mages who consider themselves to be evil with or without the influence of a Caul. Mages from other factions may employ them (with Storyteller approval, of course), although such philosophies are essentially malevolent, those practices are near-universally banned, and the instruments are atrocious by their very nature.

Regarding details about how focus elements are used in play, see the Mage 20 rulebook ("Belief, Focus, and Paradigm," p. 259; "Belief, Practice, and Tools," pp. 529-530; and "Focus and the Arts," pp. 565-600) and The Book of Secrets (pp. 167-209).

# Aberration and Heresy

Satanism. Gnosticism. Palo Mayombe. Thugee. Unorthodox and forbidden variations on "respectable" creeds constitute an aberrant approach to a practice — one often deemed "heretical" and subjected (sometimes rightly) to persecution and extermination by the dominant group. And although such practices are not Nephandic by default, the Fallen often enjoy using those inversions of respectability as practices of their own.

Tradition accuses these heretical practices of the darkest sorts of evil; civil and religious authorities use those accusations to whip up public support for bloody crackdowns on such groups. Because history tends to be written by the winners, those accusations range from exaggerations — seizing on some

discomfiting feature of the heretical practice and then blowing it sky high (the way the Catholic Church emphasized what would now be called pansexual and polyamorous "sexual perversions" among the Bogomils) — to fabrications of invented horrors that justify crackdowns (the way some American journalists, psychiatrists, and evangelists claimed RPGs and heavy-metal musicians nurtured teen crimes and suicide cults).

Factually speaking, most "heresies" are simply groups of people who reject the establishment's religious practices and beliefs. Every so often, though, a heretical creed really *does* involve monstrous behavior. And in the World of Darkness, Fallen mages, their cults, and their allies propagate aberrant practices to gory-handed ends even when other followers of that unorthodox creed do not.

(One non-monstrous real-life "heresy," the Yazidi reverence for Melek Taus, the Peacock Angel, might seem at first glance to be a natural fit for Nephandi. In reality, it's far from it. Despite centuries of slander and persecution from Muslims, Christians and occultists alike, Melek Taus is not Satan and the Yazidis are not — although referred to as such in many occult works — devil worshippers. Given that the real-life Yazidi people struggle against outright extermination by Muslim and Christian forces alike, it would be in extremely poor taste to count their creed as a potential venue for Nephandi heresy.)

Heretical practices often favored by the Nephandi and their devotees include (but aren't limited to) the following entries. These heresies aren't paradigms or practices as such, but they can influence a character's choice of focus elements (as detailed in Mage 20 and The Book of Secrets), possibly while providing a source for social and political clout (as in Backgrounds like Cult, Influence, and Resources), potential Fallen dupes and recruits, and material for Nephandic storylines.

For details about the referenced practices below, see the appropriate entries in Mage 20 (Chapter Ten), The Book of Secrets (Chapter Three), and the "Fallen Practices" section of this book.

#### Alternative Sciences

Creationism. Vitalism. Orgone. Eugenics. Christian Science and Dianetics. Theories about Atlantis, a flat earth, and the Hollow Earth. To a modern scientist, such concepts are heretical. And yet, as any mage (even one from the Technocracy) can tell you, the conventional view of materialistic science is not, shall we say, the whole picture. Alternative sciences (AKA junk science, pseudoscience, discredited theories, and so forth) form fertile ground for metaphysical practices. The Etherite Tradition, in fact, is built upon such heresies, with many other approaches to the Arts based upon those ideas as well. Old Crowley himself defined his approach to magick as "the art and science," so although mainstream scientific authorities have (with or without the influence of Technocratic propagators) rejected such ideas, alternative sciences are alive and well in the 21st century.

Which makes them excellent tools for Nephandic exploitation.

From a Fallen standpoint, rejected scientific theories provide venues for profitable exploitation of nonsensical fads and diets that can be fatal to their devotees; inspire cultish devotion that spills into emotional and physical violence; justify neglect and abuse of children and vulnerable adults; encourage dangerous and potentially corrupt experiments and innovations; spread diseases by rejecting medical treatments; defund valid research programs and scientific teachings; tear down people and programs that attempt to enhance human knowledge and accomplishment; pit believers against one another; and drain the bank accounts of useful idiots who'll pay vast sums of money for "energy cleansings," false cures, exploitative gurus, and outright poisons.

Alternative science is not in itself Nephandic. Nor is it a single practice or creed, but a general term for a wide range of ostensibly scientific theories and applications. Game-wise, these sciences often form the basis of practices like Faith, Invigoration, Chaos Magick, Dominion, Martial Arts, and – of course – Weird Science. When deployed by a Nephandus, those practices (and their associated paradigms and instruments) get used in deliberately malignant fashion. Believers are scammed, cults established, and arguments spread that justify any sort of absurdity under the guise of "things they don't want you to know about." More subtly, these creeds and cults undermine trust and the Consensus, which tilts the balance of power further into Fallen hands. Thanks to the internet, these destructive heresies spread worldwide, undermining Technocratic efforts and recruiting mystic technomancers into the Nephandic fold even when they don't see who the source of their unconventional science truly is.

## Dark Paganism (or Heathenism)

A catch-all term for modern pagan practices that favor the bloodier and warlike elements of pre-Christian religions from Europe, Oceana, Africa, and the Middle East, Dark Paganism embraces gods like Loki, Apep, Pan, Gaunab, Tiamat, Wotan, Set, Pele, Bacchus, and the Morrigan. Nature and the gods, to this perspective, are tumultuous and violent forces, and so followers who choose to be more honest than the white-lighters of New-Age-style neopaganism indulge their Jungian shadows in rude and sometimes brutal ways.

Most often, this approach boils down to saying and doing things other pagans or heathens don't like. At their worst (typically Fallen) extremes, however, dark pagans can revel in ethnic genocide, casual violence, wild drugs, treacherous trickery, church burnings and other forms of terrorism, sexual exploitation, outright rape, mutilation, murder, and occasional sacrifices of human and animal offerings...often conducted with the sadistic flourish of a blood eagle or a Bronze Bull. These extremities give all pagans and heathens ("dark" and otherwise) a bad name. In the old days, such practices stirred up witch hunters and Crusaders; more recently, they inspire police crackdowns, moral panics, and

sensationalistic denunciations from religious and psychiatric authorities. Militantly dark pagans, of course, view their practices as a justified war against oppressive Christian and Muslim establishments...and when the Fallen are involved, that war may escalate to the sorts of demented rituals and bloodthirsty conspiracies that Jack Chick warned us about.

As a focus element, extremely Dark Paganism is essentially a cross between the practices Faith, God-Bonding, the Art of Desire (in its most sexual aspects), and Witchcraft, with instruments like Blood and Fluids, Bones and Remains, Elements, Herbs and Plants, Weapons, Offerings and Sacrifices, Ordeals and Exertions, Sex and Sensuality, Weapons, and other tools that emphasize the crueler aspects of the Old Ways. Though popular with *barabbi* of the Verbenae, Bata'a, Ecstatic, Hollower, and Chakravanti persuasions, this militant approach to paganism resonates with malcontents of all kinds, especially those in regions where a vibrant pre-Christian culture has been violently suppressed by monotheistic creeds.

#### Lilithianism

Named for the reputed Mother of Demons but rooted in Mesopotamian legends far older than Judaism, the creed of Lilith, the Dark Mother, takes forms ranging from modern artistic feminism to Olippothic lore to the anguish cult known in the World of Darkness as the Bahari, inheritors of the Dark Garden. In all forms, Lilithianism reveres the First Woman who - according to rabbinical legend - was created equal to Adam, refused to be his inferior, rebelled against God's dominion (after, according to some tales, becoming God's lover), and escaped into the wastelands to assert her power alone. Certain tales claim she become lovers with the fallen angels Lucifer or Samael, that she "lay with the beasts of the sea" and sired multitudes of demons, and that she stalks the descendants of Adam and Eve as revenge for having her own children murdered by angels on the orders of God. Everyone from '90s rock stars to modern pagans and heretical vampires have claimed her as a godhead, and Olippothic lore associates her (as detailed on pp. XX-XX) with the 10th, ninth, and third Qlippoth of the Tree of Knowledge. Her creed, then, embraces liberation, defiance, sensual carnality, femininity, and quite often revenge.

More of a religious creed than a practice per se, Lilithianism comprises a form of Dark Paganism specifically related to the Dark Mother and her ways. Its sacraments specifically involve Blood and Fluids, pain (Ordeals), Sex and Sensuality, Herbs and Plants, the Element of water, personal sacrifice, and a sense of bonding with that goddess in the most intimate ways possible. This Path favors women, obviously, though men and nonbinary people can follow Lilith too.

#### Luciferianism

The Morning Star, brightest and most glorious of rebels, enjoys the highest seat at the table of heresies. As a figure of heresy, who could possibly beat the angel who stood up to God and told him where to stick his Creation? Ruling rather



than serving, Lucifer has become, to those who revere him, the archetypal revolutionary. Not as brutish as the common view of Satan, this elegant figure has been a pop-culture icon since *Paradise Lost*. As the world careers further and further from theocratic order, the Morning Star attains a level of popularity unprecedented by any other figure — even Lilith — of his kind.

On a darker level, Lucifer attains a sort of alpha-predatory status among folks who favor the "rule in hell" aspect over the "rebel against heaven" idea. To these devotees, Lucifer presents a dominant figure of power through strength — standing and fighting rather than kneeling and praying. This Lucifer burns bright enough to sear the mortal soul, and his followers wish to do likewise. For them, Luciferianism is more than a simple ethos of rebellion; it's a license to dominate, consume, and destroy.

Like Lilithianism, Luciferianism is more of a creed than a practice. Devotees of Luciferian godhood focus their beliefs and spellwork through a combination of God-Bonding (channeling the energies of Lucifer), High Ritual Magick, and the Art of Desire in its most glamorous forms; practitioners who identify with Lucifer as an archetype rather than a god combine that Art of Desire with Dominion, Invigoration, and the Hypereconomics aspect of the AoD. The latter favor

modern corporate culture over the dated silliness of Satanic rituals, and although they tap into the same metaphysical powers employed by any sort of mage, they tend to view those powers as rewards for courageous domination and human perfectionism rather than as gifts from the Rebel Angel himself.

#### Palo Mayombe

Often regarded as the "evil twin" of Santeria and other voodoo creeds, Palo Mayombe comprises an approach to power through living sacrifice and sinister spirits. In this disreputable scion of West African and South American traditions, the practitioner calls upon spirits of death and vengeance in order to claim wealth and assert power over his enemies. Known in Brazil as Quimbanda, Palo Mayombe employs large cauldrons as portals into the Otherworlds, through which offerings of food, sacrificed animals, and occasional human beings are given to entities like Zarabanda (the divine messenger of the Underworld), El Christo Negro (the crucified Black Christ who rules the Underworld), Madre De La Luna (Mother of Night, Great Lady of Los Brujos De Las Noches, and wielder of the Full Moon Knife), San Simon (Keeper of Law, Justice, and Revenge, who bestows invisibility on favored mortals), and Los Espiritus Intranquilos (the Seven Tranquil Spirits, who grant command over the In-Tranquil – a collective entity comprised of restless, damned souls who still wander the earth). Although the creed also features healing magicks, blessings, and patrons of justice, it's popular with South American gangsters, insurgents, and other desperados...and thus, with Nephandi from Central and South America as well.

In Mage terms, this creed combines the practices of Shamanism, Voudoun, and Medicine-Work, but does not engage the Loa who are described in Gods & Monsters, Chapter Four. Cauldrons (Cups and Vessels) are essential, with Offerings and Sacrifices being made through those giant pots and the Brews and Concoctions being made therein. Like Dark Paganism, Palo Mayombe paints Santeria and other voodoo-style creeds with a very dark brush as far as the popular imagination is concerned. Its infamous connection with Mexican drug cartels and human traffickers in the Caribbean region makes the faith a target for law enforcement agencies across two continents, and for witch-hunters and mages (particularly among the Bata'a) who despise such bloody practices.

# The Prosperity Gospel

The biblical Christ was no friend to rich people. His own teachings make this clear. Christ's frequent injunctions against greed and selfishness, though, have been conveniently downplayed through most of Christian history. The American approach to capitalism brought a new level of extremity to the idea of "Christ the King," with his proverbial golden streets and many mansions, eventually giving rise to the so-called *prosperity gospel*: a megachurch-packing heresy that pulls a handful of verses out their biblical context to suggest

that the guy who told parables about rich men in hell actually wants his people to play the stock market and become wealthy themselves. Since its inception in the late 1800s, this heresy has attained worldwide popularity. And for obvious reasons, this counter-scriptural heresy soon became a prime feeding-ground for the Fallen, who promote it heavily among pawns who would never consider their behavior "satanic" despite their own godhead's assertions otherwise.

To demonstrate the supposed truth behind this gospel, Fallen preachers use influence-based magicks to gather wealth and power, cite mangled scripture as the source of that prosperity, and promise their followers that they can attain such wealth the same way...by supporting, of course, the preachers who told them so. In the process, this approach stresses an ethic of selfishness, greed, and nationalism wrapped in thin-veiled ethnic bigotry, spreading profitable hatred in the name of their Lord.

In terms of a metaphysical practice, this heresy combines Faith with the Art of Desire or Hypereconomics. Money is a primary instrument of this approach, although Mass Media and Management and HR playvital roles in such workings too. Unlike the other heresies on this list, the prosperity gospel is vibrant (though controversial) aspect of mainstream evangelical Christianity, promoted heavily through TV programs, religious organizations, political connections, and best-selling books. As such, it commands a great deal of influence and allows its practitioners to get away with almost anything, so long as they can attach a bible verse or two to the deeds they perpetrate.

#### Satanism

In occult lore and urban legends, "satanism" is a generalized label applied to a wide range of practices focused around the Evil One in his various aspects. All of them, of course, are heretical from a Christian perspective, with centuries of persecutions (up to the present day) being leveled at various groups and individuals who're supposedly "satanic" whether they practice Satanism or not. Some pagans, by contrast, maintain that "Satanism is Christianity with an attitude problem," but while that joke holds a bit of truth, actual Satanists feel differently about it, with many Satanists (notably the LaVeyan types) denying that they worship any sort of god other than themselves.

In real life, Satanism ranges from the teenage rebellion of "heavy metal Satanism," to the "Ayn Rand with ceremonies" materialist creed espoused by Anton LaVey, to Michael Aquino's Setian metaphysics and the fundie-trolling political activism of Lucien Greaves' Satanic Temple. Legends (urban and otherwise) ascribe all manner of carnage to Satanic cults and networks that reputedly feature multitudes of high-ranking conspirators dedicated to child-sacrifice and the extinction of humanity. In Mage, this collection of heresies can be whatever the Storyteller wants it to be; if the Fallen are involved with it, though (and they probably are, to some extent), you can bet that at least some of the legends are true.

Game-wise, Satanism provides a basis for Dominion, Invigoration, and the Art of Desire, potentially crossed with Chaos Magick (of the darker sort), Faith (in Satan and his devils), Witchcraft (the kind witch-hunters fear), and High Ritual Magick. Believe it or not, there actually is a postmodernist practice called Satanic yoga. Satan may be a symbolic figure of rebellious enlightenment, a "great dimensional deity" (in the words of Black Metal innovators Venom), the fallen-angel adversary of God and man who's shunned by Christianity and Islam, that same God's left-hand man (as described in the book of Job), a cosmic prank, or possibly all of them. Given the spiritual reality of Umbral entities, there could be many Satans, each with their own agenda, personality, and cults. For the Fallen, Satan may be the best recruiting tool they ever had. Whatever the reality behind him might be, he's the ultimate role model for Nephandic Descent.

#### Thugee

Named from the Hindi word thag ("deceiver") and the Sanskrit sthaga ("sly," "cunning"), this bastard child of Hindu and Islamic heresies gave the English language a new word for "criminal." The sect arose sometime during the medieval period in India, and it was well-established by 1300 CE. Based upon devotion to the Dark Mother aspect of Kali, the sect involves an ancestral cult which occasionally adopted the children of its victims into the fold. Sometimes also known as dakiti ("bandits"), these Kaliites disguise themselves as travelers or other people in need, befriend prospective targets, strangle them, ritually mutilate the corpses, dump those corpses into wells, springs or caves, and then keep their goods and money... sometimes dispersing them to other Indians in need. Under the Thugee creed, Bhowanee (the goddess, personified as her destroyer aspect, Kali) must feed on blood; that blood must be supplied by her devotees or else she will seek it by exterminating humanity as a whole. The idea of killing for the greater good resonates, of course, with the Chakravanti, and so Thanatoic barabbi have long been drawn to this heresy.

(The infamous Thanatoic archmagi Voormas was known for his devotion to Kali. The question of whether or not he and his cult were truly Nephandi, or simply fanatical death cultists with their own ideas about what a "good death" means, remains a topic of debate.)

In real-world history, this cult was outlawed in the 1830s, and is presumed to have been all but exterminated by the end of the 19th century; in the World of Darkness, of course, this presumption is totally wrong. Some sources claim this heresy was created by English colonizers, but Indian accounts about the Thugee predate the British Raj by roughly 500 years.

As a practice, Thugee combines Faith with Invigoration and Crazy Wisdom. Yoga forms a minor element of that practice, too, but its primary focus involves inhuman powers of stealth, strength, endurance and charm that are granted through devotion to the Goddess. Thugee Kaliites break most of the proscriptions of Hindu and Muslim religious

behavior, and they're said to practice blood-drinking and cannibalism — both of which are deeply forbidden by those creeds. Although Thugee is traditionally associated with the lower castes, various conspiracies supposedly link them with the higher classes, too. In a world where deceit, robbery, and destruction are innately connected to wealth and industry, the Fallen employ this heresy in ways that might not be "traditional" in real-world practices of the creed.

# Nephandic Paradigms

Despite their shared foundation in the Fall, Nephandic mages and their various pawns and allies span a diverse spectrum of beliefs. Those paradigms may be ruthless and predatory by default but the arguments behind those philosophies, and the metaphysical principles they assert, vary from mage to mage. Like most other mages, the Fallen deploy elaborate arguments to support their beliefs...and those arguments, especially for people who're already suffering from a crisis of faith or purpose, can sound pretty damn persuasive, too.

In addition to the paradigms referenced above, the following creeds represent common philosophies among the Fallen mages and their unAwakened allies. As always, those beliefs often overlap and merge together, creating — for example — a belief that "I'm a Predator and Barbarism is the Truest State of Man."

By default, all Nephandi practice some form of Maleficia. Cruelty is an innate part of what they do and why they do it. Rather than reference it constantly throughout this section, we'll simply say right here that the Maleficia practice is a given for Nephandic characters and their associated paradigms. That said, these mages tend to be subtle about where, when, and how openly they practice such things. Blatantly malevolent magicks get reserved for safely private settings and situations where the Fallen One couldn't care less who sees what because all witnesses are going to die soon anyway.

#### All Power Comes from Sin

Magick is evil. Pure and simple, it is. People who use magick while considering themselves to be holy and virtuous are delusional. Their power flows from the Underworld and infernal hosts. They are, by definition, using forbidden, evil Arts.

Common among mages (Fallen and otherwise) who accept a good vs. evil paradigm, this creed agrees with godly authorities: *Magic is inherently sinful*. Maybe it flows from demonic pacts, taps into the essence of Hell, draws upon a divine curse, or violates the established order of the universe. Whatever its source—and the mage *will* have compelling ideas about the source of his magickal powers—those powers are intrinsically corrupting and malign. By using them, a mage withdraws from the company of the blessed and joins the Devil's brood whether he realizes that or not.

Due to what could be considered a rather old-fashioned view of magick, this paradigm supports rather "traditional"

practices: High Ritual Magick, witchcraft, shamanism, mediumship, Voudon, animalism, and so forth. A mage who favors this paradigm *could* employ technology in his focus (metalsmithing, for example, was often considered a devilish craft in medieval Europe), but the belief-system depends upon a theological model of metaphysics, rather than a materialistic one. Under this paradigm, certain practices might not be considered "magic" at all; certain Indigenous American cultures, for example, employ Medicine-Work (as per that practice) as a sacred Art, but retain a dim view of "magic," which they consider to be selfish, malignant sorcery instead.

Under this paradigm, a mage who acknowledges that his power is corrupt is also accepting evil as the price of his Arts. (See the "Evil is Essential," "Forbidden Wisdom," and "Stormtroopers of the Abyss" entries in this chapter.) Thus, he'll often dress and act the part of the evil magus, employ flamboyantly malefic instruments, and adopt a philosophy of evil for power's sake. That probably sounds like most Nephandi but that's not exactly true. Many Fallen mages (and non-Fallen ones, too) do things that the average person would consider evil, and yet embrace philosophies that either assert that such actions are necessary (as opposed to evil) or deny the existence of evil to begin with. This paradigm, on the other hand, accepts evil as a metaphysical force and admits that using it makes a magus evil by default. Although that idea's probably not cosmologically true in the World of Darkness (unless maybe it is true), a mage employing this paradigm thoroughly believes it is.

In order to enhance your mystic powers, this paradigm also suggests that sinful activities — lots of sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll — make you a better magus, too. Magickal power isn't merely a product of occult study but of indulgent wickedness as well. Sensuality and spite become tools of magick in their own right; even when the mage isn't casting a spell, he lives like an outlaw and plans to die like a libertine. **Associated Practices:** The Black Mass and other malign practices detailed above.

#### Barbarism is the Truest State of Man

Civilization is weakness. Pity is for fools. A species prospers only through the constant struggle for survival. The strong rule through strength of arm and spirit. Without the constant invigoration of violence, human cultures slide toward decadence and ruin.

Articulated at length (and cribbed endlessly since then) in Ragnar Redbeard's book *Might is Right*, this paradigm asserts the rightness of force in a perpetually ruthless world. Compassion, to this perspective, is a crippling flaw. Luxury denotes weakness, and for the good of our species, the weak should perish. Man must remain dominant over all other species (and over women, as well) or other species will eventually dominate us again, as they did in the Predatory Age. There's no place for compromise or empathy. Although self-indulgent cruelty is a waste of energy, a strong person tolerates no

disobedience or limitation on his will. Violence is not only necessary but desirable. Only in the cauldron of constant force can humanity retain its dominant state.

Sharing characteristics with (and often blending into) the Predator and Prey and Strongest Survive paradigms below, this creed emphasizes brute violence and physical vitality, underscored with racial- and gender-supremacy beliefs. Even so, certain women, queer, and non-white people embrace it as well. Under this paradigm, magick is the blessing of the strong and the treachery of the weak. Conan the Barbarian and Tarl Cabot of Gor epitomize this ruthless philosophy, wherein a skillful sword arm defeats any spell a decadent wizard can conjure up. Mages who pursue this paradigm focus their Arts through physical excellence (the Invigoration practice), social domination (Dominion), combat prowess (Martial Arts), primordial spellwork (Witchcraft), bestial kindship (Animalism), and an intimate connection to warlike Old Gods like Wotan, Thor, and the Morrigan (God-Bonding). Though such practitioners might occasionally avail themselves to advanced technology (generally through Craftwork, Cybernetics, and Reality Hacking), tech tends to be viewed with suspicion. Reliance upon artificial technology, after all, denotes weakness, and although websites and internet posts can prove useful at times, there's no room for such indulgences in the real world.

These days, this paradigm shows up a lot in heathen and dark pagan subcultures (especially those with white-power tendencies), Evangelical Christian communities, radical Islamist cells, men's-rights advocate groups, anarcho-primitive advocates, and other "traditionalist" movements around the world. Rejecting the softness of civility, these groups gravitate toward apocalyptic fantasies of societal collapse. Among Nephandi, that collapse is a major goal — one they work toward with eager conviction. Once this sad excuse for society falls, those people can run free, exerting their will to power over everyone within reach. Associated Practices: Again, see above.

# Cosmic Horror is the Only Truth

Hope and happiness are illusions stretched tight over the gaping abyss that is Reality. Forsaking those illusions means staring into that abyss and recognizing the ineffable horrors it contains. We wander through life in a haze that obscures the fathomless atrocity of life. The path to power, then, involves waving away that haze, confronting horror on its own terms, and learning to live with what you see.

Bred in the collapse of what we often consider sanity, this paradigm asserts a cosmic horror show in which everything we believe to be true is delusion instead. Calling this "the Lovecraft paradigm" would not be inaccurate, though it's much older than his work. This is the darkest realm of crazy wisdom, the place where rationality is a thin façade which the practitioner is dedicated to kicking through in order to escape the maze of orderly illusion. Although most closely



affiliated with the K'lasshaa faction of Nephandi, this paradigm presents a common belief among the Fallen as a whole.

Mages who embrace cosmic horror as the source of magick practice disconcerting forms of primordial Arts — Witchcraft, Shamanism, Elementalism, Mediumship, and voodoo of the most malignant kinds. Blood, sex, bodily excretions, stone, fire and other primal elements get woven into disquieting rites of mutilation and surrender. Fear is an essential aspect of these Arts, and so the mage who performs them goes out of her way to make herself as fearsome as possible. Although modern practitioners also pursue Chaos Magick, Gutter Magick, forbidden High Ritual workings, Dominion, and ghastly Martial Arts, mages who welcome cosmic horror into their lives retain a decidedly feral aspect even on their most "civilized" behavior. Some Hindu Aghori delve into this well of cosmic horror too, though their dedication to such things unnerves even their supposedly "unterrified" peers.

Disreputable by nature, this approach to magick demands secrecy, discretion, and a good place to dispose of the bodies. People who run around howling prayers to the Abyss while covered in their victims' blood are the first targets in the sight of Nephandi-hunting mages. Other Fallen tend to use these folks as diversions, hunting down their own brethren in order to shunt suspicion away from themselves. Thus, a mage who operates under this paradigm must be clever if she plans to survive for long. In most cases, this dedication to unfathomable horror gets disguised behind a perfectionist — maybe excessively rationalist — façade until the mage can act without discovery. Magick, therefore, will be cast with utmost subtlety unless that Nephandus is secure in her remote sanctum, sure that her victims won't leave the place alive. Associated Practices: Various primitive practices noted above.

# Everyone's Against Me, so Whatever I do is Justified

The world's full of oppressive assholes who've stacked the deck against us. Conspiracies have robbed us of what we are rightfully due. We're the injured parties here, and so we're absolutely justified in doing whatever it takes to get back at those motherfuckers. Once our enemies have been put back in their rightful place, we can sit back and enjoy the world as it should be, not the world they forced upon us. The battle cry of vindictive underdogs, this paradigm revels in conspiracies and asserts the right of the mage to act against them in whichever ways he sees fit to employ. Fed up with those cis-het manbabies? Sick of those SJWs? Ready to turn the tables on your oppressive ethnicity or gender of choice? This creed excuses any methods you choose to employ, and mages (Fallen and otherwise) can employ some pretty drastic measures when they feel they've been wronged.

As a metaphysical paradigm, this creed validates the rightness of the mage's cause. If he wasn't in the moral right, acting in accord with the balance of the universe, then he couldn't do the things he does, could he? Magick is the answer to the underdog's prayers, the vindicating surge or clever subversion

that allows him to strike a blow for his rightful cause. The possibility that he might be wrong can't enter the equation at all. After all, if the mage was to question the justice of what he does, the result would be a psychic paradox (as in the Paradox Effect) created by self-doubt at a time when total assurance is the rightful path.

Although a rare paradigm among mages (whose Awakened talents demand more self-confidence than underdogs typically possess), this paradigm is a great tool for recruiting pawns, flying monkeys, and other allies. Given the internet's echo-chamber effect, the rightful-vengeance paradigm pays huge dividends on any side of a sociopolitical spectrum. Few people, after all, see themselves as the dominant and wrongful party in a dispute—they must be victimized by circumstances beyond their control! The mage who knows how to point such grievances in the right direction—and who employs influence Effects through instruments like Internet Activity, Management and HR, Mass Media, and Social Domination—can change reality without manifesting a single obvious act of magick. Belief is power, after all, and when you tag that belief to an effective course of action, the world moves to your command.

(Yes, it's ironic that Nephandi use conspiracy-based paradigms to set conspiracies in motion. The Fallen are all about delicious ironies.)

Associated Practices: Art of Desire, Bardism, Chaos Magick, Cybernetics, Dominion, Gutter Magick, Reality Hacking.

#### Evil is Necessary, and so I am Evil

Good cannot exist without evil. Therefore, evil is essential to the existence of virtue. Night defines day. Pain defines pleasure. Progress comes only through adversity, and so adversity is a fundamental aspect of existence. Without a devil, God and man cannot truly be considered "good." And if someone's got to wear the devil mask, then it might as be me.

Few people consider themselves to be evil. A handful, though, are perfectly fine with that idea. Embracing cruelty as an existential necessity, they choose a path of deliberate malice. Torture, blasphemy, hatred, lust — it's all in a day's work, my friend, and it pays great dividends besides. A willful sinner is a happy sinner, flush with rewards forbidden to folks of a more virtuous disposition.

Philosophically, this paradigm takes on the role of the necessary evil: someone who's willing to play the bad guy and test the hero's worth. After all, without such people, what good would heroes be? Sure, it's a cliché — the villain who taunts the hero with claims that "I'm just like you after one bad day" — but an effective one, especially where other mages are concerned. From this perspective, the choice to commit evil serves as a challenge to the goodness of one's foes. "If you're strong enough to resist me," a Fallen mage might claim, "then you prove your virtue worthwhile — and if you can't, then you were never truly good to begin with."

Moral pretenses aside, a person choosing this paradigm enjoys being an asshole. Like the *Cosmic Horror* advocate above, a practitioner who's inclined toward this philosophy tends to wear her evil on her sleeve whenever possible. Wickedness is fun, and this philosophy indulges it. The mage has to be careful, of course, about how evil she chooses to be and how obvious she is about committing said evil. As mentioned earlier, folks who seem *too* happy about being evil tend to live short and violent lives.

Associated Practices: Art of Desire, Black Mass, Chaos Magick, Gutter Magick, High Ritual Magick, Reality Hacking, Witchcraft, Voudon

# Existence is Unknowable, Irrational, and Sublime

Rationality is the blindfold people use to comfort themselves within a fundamentally irrational cosmos. There's no such thing as logic or reason — they're human constructions that crumble when confronted with the awful immensity of the truth. We are pathetic monkey-kin, scrabbling around with our eyes sewn deliberately shut. Only when we open ourselves to the implacable immensity of the Void do we begin to grasp how absurd the human pageant is.

Under this belief system, magick flows through cracks in the rational delusion. To access it, a practitioner embraces madness, behaves in counter-rational fashion, and deranges her senses and thinking process in order to tap into the profound irrationality beyond human precepts. Because such behavior tends to get a person in trouble (especially in today's world), mages who accept this paradigm assert an outwardly rational persona in order to interact with the rest of the world on a day-to-day basis. Underneath that masquerade, however, a Nephandus following this paradigm views the whole pretense as a big game. Whenever possible, she'll throw off her mask and dive full-force into the sea of madness...temporarily for now, but someday soon, forever.

As a rule, this paradigm suits ecstatic practices, Chaos Magick, certain forms of Shamanism and Animalism, and especially disreputable forms of Yoga, Tantra, and Martial Arts. It's especially prevalent among *barabbi* from the Cult of Ecstasy, who live close enough to the edge of this concept as it is. Chakravanti, Hermetics, and Akashayana can stray into this belief system when they grow too focused on the chaos underscoring order. A growing number of technomancers accept this paradigm as well; science that reaches past the accepted laws of physics finds itself in a space where theoretically *anything* is possible, and so all limits become reflections of a limited, stagnant human view.

Eventually, this paradigm tilts a mage toward the Marauder end of the Ascension War. Order, after all, is a prison which must be broken open and scattered to the winds before true enlightenment sets in. Because it's at heart an existential extremity — all reason and logic are subject to acceptance or

rejection by each individual mind which must finally reject those things altogether in order to perceive existence as it truly is — this paradigm fits into particularly abstract forms of Weird Science and Reality Hacking. Nephandi who embrace it become tricksters of the most dangerous sort: those whose "jests" undercut all stability and aim toward an apocalyptic breakdown of an ordered and reliable world.

Associated Practices: Animalism, Bardism, Chaos Magick, Dominion, Elementalism, Martial Arts, Psionics, Shamanism, Weird Science, Yoga.

# Forbidden Wisdom is the Truest Source of Power

Limits are for little people. True power belongs to those with the courage to defy taboos, seizing insight and mastery wherever it can be found. Oh, those laws are set in place for a reason; we wouldn't want the rabble to know what we know. Still, the greatest secrets of Art and influence are locked behind walls of custom and misdirection. Find them. Use them. If you're strong enough to shake those limitations aside, you might be worthy of using the things you find where you're not supposed to go.

A quintessential outlaw creed, this paradigm eschews all laws and consequences that stand in the way of power. To be accepted into a company of peers, a mage who accepts this paradigm must stomp to bits all limitations on his path. Epitomized by the "Left-Hand" approach to Tantra (an approach that is not in itself Nephandic), this paradigm stresses wisdom through transgression and accomplishment through transcendence beyond law. As Robert Anton Wilson put it, "reality is what you can get away with," and although all Awakened mages subscribe to this belief in some degree, those who embrace this paradigm make a virtue out of lawlessness.

Transgression plays a part in many metaphysical practices; even so, most practitioners still place limits on how far they're willing to go. Not these people, though. Followers of this belief system are, by definition, renegades. Their practices gut social conventions and shatter moral codes. That which is forbidden to others is desirable for them: sex magick, blood magick, blasphemy, cannibalism, drugs of the most mind-bending sorts, demon bargains, cybernetic mutilations, ... that's just the beginning for mages of this kind. Nephandi tend toward horrible behavior simply because of who and what they are, but the Fallen who accept this paradigm favor theft, rape, betrayal, racism, torture, sadistic murder, and extreme acts of self-destruction for their own sake as the most potent sorts of magickal tools. Even by Nephandic standards, these people are perilous company to keep. No atrocity is beyond them because the very concept of atrocity marks the place where true wisdom and power begin.

Associated Practices: Animalism, Bardism, Black Mass, Chaos Magick, Cybernetics, Dominion, God-bonding, Gutter Magick, High Ritual Magic, Invigoration, Reality Hacking, Weird Science, Witchcraft, Yoga.

#### I am All

The world is a hallucination inside my head. Nothing exists but that I believe it does. All Creation came into being on the day I was born, and it will all wink out of existence on the day I die. Between now and then, the world is as I make it to be. The only limits I accept on my creative powers are those imposed by my ability to imagine them and my will to bring them to pass.

Yes, there really *are* people who think this way. Although this paradigm began as an avant-garde thought experiment, the philosophy known as *metaphysical solipsism* took hold in the 20th century and has become, in the internet age, a self-sustaining paradigm...and a self-perpetrating one, thanks to the "disconnected connectivity" of internet culture.

At its core, metaphysical solipsism can be summed up as, "I'm the star and this is my movie." Everyone else is a walk-on provided by the believer's consciousness, intended to fill out the story and teach certain lessons the subconscious wishes to learn. The laws of nature are therefore bound only to the mage's ability to conceive of ways around them. Magick, then, comes from your ability to consciously reimagine the world as you wish it to be, and then follow through with whatever changes need to be made in order to bring that vision to pass.

Why is this idea so popular among Nephandi? Because a world that doesn't truly exist is subject to whatever you wish to do to it. People don't matter. Pain does not matter. Everything's a show staged for the amusement of the mage, and so any imaginable atrocity is justified by its lack of ultimate consequences. Solipsistic Nephandi enact epic cruelties for their amusement. That person isn't really screaming as it chews on the razor blades you forced into his mouth because there is no person, there are no razor blades, and the blood and screaming are figments of your imagination. Reality becomes a grindhouse splatter fest because the mage in question enjoys that sort of thing. Even that mage's enemies are shadows of her consciousness, dispersed with vulgar magicks or clever strategies that are certain to work because nothing actually exists without unless that mage wants it to exist.

Associated Practices: Art of Desire, Chaos Magick, Dominion, Elementalism, Gutter Magick, Invigoration, Psionics, Reality Hacking, Weird Science.

## I'm a Predator, and the World is My Prey

Eat or be eaten. That's the way of the world. Pity is a death sentence. The tiger feels no sympathy for the goat, and only fools consider their prey to be anything other than nourishment on the hoof. A clever hunter, of course, is careful to use his environment as cover until he's ready to strike. In order to be effective, then, pretend to be someone other than who you truly are until you're ready to make the kill.

Detailed in Chapter One, this predatory paradigm forms a vital part of the Nephandic foundation. All Fallen paradigms,



to some degree, incorporate this perspective. Some Nephandi, though, place predation at the apex of their belief system. Power, they feel, comes from accepting your place at the top of the metaphysical food chain and if you do not, someone else will, at your expense.

Such predation involves more than simple social influence or physical consumption. An Awakened predator seeks energetic fulfillment as well. She consumes psychic energy through social influence and emotional domination and Quintessential energy through the Prime Sphere (detailed in How Do You DO That? pp. 49-51, 117-128, and 134-136), and quite likely material sustenance through the instrument of Cannibalism (as described in The Book of Secrets, pp. 206-207). For her, feeding on other people is her right, and magick comes from her recognizing her proper state as an Enlightened metaphysical carnivore. This Nephandus can make eloquent arguments favoring this state of affairs, and those convictions drive her approach to magick, relationships, and life in general.

Associated Practices: Animalism, Art of Desire, Dominion, Invigoration, Martial Arts, Psionics, Voudon, Witchcraft.

# Indulgence is Nature's Only Law

There is no higher moral authority than my own self-interest. Catering to weaklings who are too afraid to seize their own power involves surrendering my autonomy to their frailty instead of reveling in my own vitality. Nature has no place for the cowardly and weak. Civilization is a façade built by tyrants that allows them to reign over us. I accept no such dominion

over me. Instead, I will impose my will upon others. Unless someone can stop me with their own strength and violence, they have no moral right to deny my pleasures. Nature is on my side, God does not exist, and the highest good a man can achieve comes through dominating those weaker than himself.

Expounded upon at length in the works of the Marquis de Sade, this philosophy asserts that the pursuit of absolute pleasure, in defiance of all law and consequences, is the ultimate freedom of enlightened men and women. No taboo can be allowed to stand unchallenged. No law may remain unbroken. Outlawry is the vital thrust of nature, and those who cannot grasp such concepts and fuck them up the ass to their utmost orgasmic conclusion are fit only to be slaves of those of us who can.

Obviously, this paradigm resembles Might is Right, Predator and Prey, and other creeds on this list. Sade's credo, however, is explicitly (very explicitly) erotic and transgressive — not merely a license for survival and dominion but for sensual and sexual excess as well. Life, Sade maintained, is best expressed through the forces of deadly sexuality and sexual demise. Fear, lust, agony, and violation stimulate vital energies, and the quest for ultimate perversion is the highest expression of liberty.

It's worth noting that the Marquis de Sade himself often behaved more humanely than his countrymen, especially during the Terror era of the French Revolution. His fictional libertines, however, acted out his philosophy with the demonic ferocity that gave *sadism* its name. Those characters and their victims commit and endure atrocities far beyond the capacities of the human body; Nephandi, of course, have ways of working around those limitations, and become the

most fearsome of their kind. Excruciating degradation, to them, is the ultimate expression of Enlightened Arts — and magick, to their view, proves that Sade was correct. Such mages envision themselves as the living embodiments of this philosophy. They pursue ultimate freedom with such intensity that nature itself gifts them with inhuman powers...powers that prove their superiority and allow them to take their lusts to even greater extremities.

Given their taste for flamboyant abomination, these Fallen Ones reside in remote estates, palaces, and Realms. Their lavish homes display grotesque wealth and an ostentatious lack of taste. Favoring the classic image of bygone nobility, these mages tend to favor archaic and fanciful modes of dress, speech, behavior, and décor that evoke European lords and ladies of the 18th and 19th centuries. Filled with slaves and companions of stunning beauty and staggering deformity, these getaways feature abattoirs and torture chambers where victims are subjected to whatever cruelties a jaded magus can conceive. Given half a chance, Nephandi who subscribe to this philosophy will wax poetic about "natural passions" and "the remorseless urge life has toward freedom." Regarding the lives and freedoms lost to their implacable lusts, their response is an inevitable shrug and some various on the sentiment that "that's just the way life is."

Associated Practices: Animalism, Art of Desire, Black Mass, Dominion, Elementalism, Faith, Invigoration, High Ritual Magick, Witchcraft.

#### Only the Strongest Deserve to Survive

Life is ruthless, vicious, and cruel. It belongs to those who can meet it on its own terms, and those who can't either serve the strong or die. Nature is a nasty bitch. She's got no patience for your whining about fairness and equality. All that matters in the long run is your ability to stand up to everything she throws at you. Prosperity is taken - by any available means - from the hands of those people weak enough to lose what you gain. This isn't up for discussion. Go cry to someone who cares, loser. Me, I'm a winner, and everyone who gets in my way will find out what winning really means. This key paradigm for the Eaters of the Weak asserts the moral and magickal right to trample those who are not strong enough to defend themselves. A variation on the Barbarism and Predator paradigms above (and of Might is Right, detailed in Mage 20), this philosophy is self-motivated and willfully callous. It's also incredibly popular these days; from Robert Greene's motivational books to corporate culture and vast swaths of the internet, the belief that prosperity and survival belong only to people strong enough to claim them resonates across our world.

Magic, under this creed, is a reward for ruthless discipline. Awakening belongs to the elite, placing them, by definition, above the common herd. People who are not Enlightened in this mover-and-shaker sense are not worth pity or attention — only tactical flattery when they seem useful, and exploitation when they're not. Unlike the more primal philosophies, this belief system fits beautifully into the industrial era...an era

that, historically speaking, was built upon it. The reality we live in is the product of this sort of magick, which makes this paradigm especially appealing to technomancers of all varieties. Let teary-eyed wizards, tripping hippies, whiny witches, and the sad-sack remnants of dirt-smeared primitives play patty cake with their oh-so-precious Sleepers. Smart mages know the score: Winners All, Losers Nothing.

Associated Practices: Animalism, Art of Desire, Craftwork, Cybernetics, Dominion, Hypertech, Invigoration, Martial Arts, Psionics, Reality Hacking, Weird Science, Witchcraft.

#### People are Shit

We suck and should be destroyed. Humanity is a disease, and the only truly moral solution involves wiping us from the Earth. Nature wants us to destroy ourselves, and magick is her most effective tool. When we annihilate ourselves, the world can get a fresh start... and if it's too fucked up to begin again, then at least it's no longer stuck with us.

This grim-yet-pertinent paradigm maintains that we're inherently bad news. Humanity had its shot, we blew it, and we all deserve to die. Ultimate extinction is the best possible scenario. Hope is bullshit, civilization's pretense, you know the drill by now, just put us out of everyone's misery already.

For some odd reason, this is an especially popular paradigm these days. Nephandi certainly aren't the only mages who feel this way, though they might be the ones most actively seeking our demise. The argument sounds pretty compelling in the 21st century, and it's an excellent recruiting tool for converts, allies, and folks who think they share this sentiment until the moment comes for them to actually die.

As a magickal belief, the *People Are Shit* paradigm generally ties in with another, more complex and nuanced philosophy. Once upon a time, our species might have had a chance for something better. Now, though, nothing remains but the final bullet in our collective skulls. Postmodern pagans, chaos mages, and people with little more to lose tend to gravitate to this paradigm, although certain cynical Technocrats have begun to feel it's a valid end to a deeply flawed species. Thus, although this paradigm favors Gaian cosmology or nihilistic sciences, the sentiment itself can fit into any sect or practice.

**Associated Practices:** Anything that helps speed up our painful, eternal demise.

# Rebellion is the Road to Transcendence

No one ever got anywhere by following the rules they were given. Laws are slavery. Limits are for other people. Like Lucifer, we were meant to reign in Hell, not serve in Heaven. Magick is a Promethean Art, stolen from gods or nature and wielded by the sacred outlaws who dare to do what others fear.

Overtly rebellious and contemptuous of authority, this paradigm demands total freedom to follow one's own Path

# **Antinomianism**

Named from the Greek words for "against" and "law," antinomianism rejects legalism and custom on philosophical grounds. Transgression is desirable, while obedience is a moral failure. Among Hermetic wizards and other devotees of strict metaphysical orders, antinomianism becomes a rite of passage wherein the seeker breaks her own ethical codes and the rules of her society in order to reach beyond law and find a greater truth than obedience. Certain Gnostics and other Christian heretics (like the mad monk Rasputin) view sin as vehicle for greater devotion to God, rejecting human hierarchies in favor of Divine Grace and personal virtue. Breaking God's holy laws is, in Islam, often a capital offense...a fact that hasn't kept Sufis and other unorthodox Muslims from reaching beyond earthly law in an effort to attain the deeper truths of Allah. Left-Hand Tantra is antinomian by nature, as are the various Western Magical practices that rank progress by shattering taboos. In Buddhism, certain practices assert that truly enlightened people rise beyond mortal laws — a transcendence noted in Taoism by the statement that compares an enlightened sage to the ruthlessness of nature and the gods — while others employ antinomianism to shatter the false divisions of illusory perception.

Although easily mistaken for a lazy creed, antinomianism (at least in theory) demands a high level of personal integrity. As Bob Dylan said, "to live outside the law, you must be honest." The ideal governing antinomianism philosophy asserts that a person who moves beyond law (or, as Nietzsche put it, beyond the crude limits of good and evil) has undertaken a greater moral step than someone who simply does what he's told. To distinguish true antinomianism from childish temper tantrums, the practitioner must break the rules purposefully, and then use the energy freed through that transgression to guide deeper insights and energize metaphysical commands. It takes great self-discipline to break rules in such a way; by transcending external authority and placing one's self in the hands of one's own principles, the antinomian practitioner accepts full responsibility for himself. "I am not the laws they gave me," the theory goes, "but a law unto myself."

wherever it might lead. Anything less is a betrayal of one's sacred will to power. Anticonformity is this creed's gospel, and magick is its reward. The mage who embraces such beliefs steals fire from the heavens and spits in mortality's face. Her personal convictions are the only sorts of law she respects.

Mages of this kind *do* tend to be people of their word. Even the Fallen sort of outlaws seem more trustworthy than most of their Nephandic peers, if only because they believe in rebelling against all authorities, even Nephandic ones. That said, they can be trusted to betray all companions the

moment it seems like such alliances become too reliable. *All* forms of structure are to be smashed and left broken along the Path to Descent.

For obvious reasons, this paradigm sustains chaotic, disruptive, and often catastrophic practices and spells. Breaking things down is an intimate part of this philosophy. Technology, to such beliefs, is a tool, not a destination. Although reality hackers of all sorts adore this philosophy (at least in theory), technological instruments provide a useful but ultimately disposable subversion tool. Ecstatic Cultists are especially susceptible to this argument. If the Path to Enlightenment involves breaking through barriers, after all, then *all* barriers — even the ones designed to protect us from ourselves — must be destroyed.

**Associated Practices:** Bardism, Black Mass, Chaos Magick, Dominion, Gutter Magick, Psionics, Reality Hacking, Yoga.

#### We are Stormtroopers of the Abyss

We are burdened with great purpose, and that purpose involves fucking shit up. We're the devil's own, and when he points his finger, we do the job, grinning all the way to hell.

One of the few Nephandic paradigms that accept a subservient role to a greater power, this creed positions the believer as an earthly agent of infernal entities. Those powers might not be Satanic per se — war bodhisattvas, Lilith, malevolent gods, and Unnamable Horrors From Beyond The Horizon all count as potential patrons under this philosophy. Whatever the nature of these abyssal forces, the mage is committed to doing their bidding in the human world. For his dedication, the mage receives inhuman powers and a front row seat at the Apocalypse he helps to set in motion.

Obviously, a person subscribed to this outlook is dedicated to malevolence. He's damned, he knows it, and he's having the time of his life because the alternative sucks. Violent, hedonistic, and reveling in obscenity, this devotee of abominations makes no excuse for his behavior. Oh, he'll be careful when he has to be — it's no fun waiting for Doomsday in a cell. His evil, though, isn't freighted with pretentious justifications. He is Satan's soldier, and following orders provides one hell of a good time.

In a way, this philosophy provides power through surrender. Freed from esoteric constraints, the Fallen mage who adopts this paradigm throws his energy into cheerful malevolence. Nephandic allies who enter Fallen service with open eyes gravitate to the stormtrooper role; bikers, gangbangers, mercenary butchers, and other willing criminals get a sense of purpose from this creed. They are, after all, doing Luciferian service, which grants them license to rob, rape, torture, and kill their way through life in the name of something bigger than themselves.

Associated Practices: Animalism, Black Mass, Godbonding, Dominion, Elementalism, Invigoration, Martial Arts, Mediumship, Shamanism, Witchcraft, Voudon.

# Fallen Practices

Any practice a Nephandus pursues is, in some fashion, Maleficia. That's just the nature of these particular beasts. Within that malevolent practice, however, a Fallen mage can use whichever other practices seem to fit her needs and background. Certain practices—especially Faith and Medicine-Work—don't fit especially well into the Fallen approach unless they're being either used as a cover or perverted from their original intentions. Others, notably Alchemy, Voudoun, Witchcraft, and Yoga, have disreputable applications and heretical variations. Still others, especially Animalism, the Art of Desire, Dominion, and High Ritual Magick, seem to have been tailored at least in part by Nephandi because they suit Fallen agendas so well.

Unless a Fallen magus is operating under deep cover within a group like the Traditions or Technocratic Union, the Nephandic approach to each practice is as malevolent as possible. Witchcraft favors the Satanic mode of witch-craze propaganda or the feral gore of Greek mythology; animalism reflects the dreadful capabilities of born predators; hypertech features frightening machines crafted with sinister purpose; shamanism and voodoo practices bond with malign spirits and the most terrifying aspects of the Loa; weird science includes disconcerting alien designs and theoretically impossible principles; faith employs the Black Mass and other perversions, while High Ritual Magick invokes Goetic powers and desolate Olippothic energies; dominion, invigoration, and the Art of Desire affirm the utter rightness of a Nietzschean übermench towering over lesser human sheep. Even when disguised as "normal" applications of metaphysical practices, a Nephandic approach to that practice will seem harsh, ruthless, and more than a bit frightening. Normalizing such extremity through philosophical justifications is one of those things the Fallen excel at doing.

In addition to practices described in Mage 20 and The Book of Secrets, the following practices are favored by – though not restricted to – the Fallen Ones:

## **A**byssalism

Beyond illusions of a rational Creation, the Void Absolute awaits the ending of the human dream. Those who understand the truth of that Void can channel its power through obscene rites and devotion to cosmic chaos. Some werewolves refer to this power as the Wyrm, but it's far bigger than that mythic entity. Abyssalism links a magus to primal chaos and transforms reality with its waves.

Paradoxically primal yet sophisticated, Abyssalism fixes its attention on the liminal spaces between finite order and infinite chaos. As a magickal practice, it expresses itself in deliberate contradictions: celestial correspondences, mathematical formulae which should not be correct and yet somehow *are*, perversions of scientific theory, hallucinogenic drugs and drug-free psychotic breaks, personality disassociation, extremes of animalistic or near-robotic behavior, designs of dizzying

complexity or stark abhorrent simplicity, apparent gibberish that betrays an uncanny sense of truth, and similar displays of unnerving counter-rationality. In the hands of an Abyssal technomancer in Denial (see below), those displays may seem implacably *rational* instead. Either way, the manifestations, tools, and rituals of Abyssalism, when beheld by someone other than the mage, hold a queasy sense of being *wrong*. Even when they appear completely innocuous, that sense of pervasive chaos oozes through.

In use, Abyssalism employs uncanny chants; freakish designs that are carved, written, painted or sometimes inscribed in empty air; various forms of transgression, violation, and atrocity (as per those instrument entries); disquieting technology (organic cybernetics, sadistic machinery, freakish geometry, ghastly medical procedures, and so forth); the proverbial "stars are right" astrological correspondences; and bloody offerings of mutilation and fear. Those primal chaos energies manifest as waves or clouds or non-fire flames of the absence of light. Nerve-searing sounds – dissonant music, howling voices, cries of celestial torment – often accompany such manifestations unless the mage evokes the empty silence of the Void instead. Although that mage may have learned how to channel his Arts through chilly modes of technology or currents of obscene coincidence, these expressions of primal Absolute are usually vulgar magick if they might be viewed by mortal eyes.

Practitioners who employ the Psionics practice can channel that Abyssal essence into invisible Mind-Sphere assaults, as detailed in **The Book of Secrets**, pp. 203-205, and **How Do You** DO **That?** pp. 121-122. Even then, however, the appalling sense of *wrongness* infests the consciousness of the people on the receiving end of those attacks, inspiring bad dreams and existential fears even without additional rule-based Effects.

Ideally, an Abyssal practitioner pretends to be just another average person until she reaches a safe place where she can revel in her metaphysical dementia. Even on her best behavior, this mage comes across as quirky and kind of frightening in a silent sort of way. When released from the constraints of mundane society, she becomes the archetypal chaos-agent — nakedly primal or implacably mechanistic. The frenzied cults most associated with the Fallen Ones feature Abyssal mages and their depraved servitors. Secluded, they stage blasphemous rituals and attempt to conjure nightmarish things from hell-Realms, the Void, and the Underworld. The sites of those revels writhe with toxic Resonance and bubble over with noxious Quintessence energies.

Paradox backlashes for this practice assume one of three forms: a deeper plunge into arcane madness (see below), clouds and explosions of black non-light, or horrific entities conjured from the Void. Those Paradox energies melt or sear the mage's mortal form; the creatures arriving from the Absolute tend to drag that errant mages with them to the Void, where the laughing magus awaits oblivion and her final communion with the Absolute.

A mage who uses this practice is a hair's breadth away from Marauderdom. Irrationality is its foundation, and metaphysical dementia is its price. This dementia is no simple mental illness but a state of surrender to the irrational essence of the Absolute. Rules-wise, that mage is permanently stuck in Quiet (as detailed in Mage 20, pp. 554-561), from Level 1 to Level 3 at the very least. That Quiet usually manifests as either Madness or Morbidity, although Abyssal technomancers (especially those seeded among the Technocratic Union) tend to manifest Denial instead. At higher levels of disconnection, the Nephandus slides over to the K'llasshaa faction unless she's a Denial-bound technomage; even then, her insanity becomes so intense that even her most rational peers begun to question her mental faculties. Large Paradox backlashes or severe traumas push the Abyssal one over the ledge; ironically, the resulting Marauder may well wind up hating the Nephandi she once counted as her kin. At worst, she might become an Abyssal lunatic, her mind deranged without providing even the potential relief of treatable mental illness or the metaphysical insights of Quiet or the Mad.

Associated Paradigms: A World of Gods and Monsters, All Power Comes from Sin, Ancient Wisdom is the Key, Cosmic Horror is the Only Truth, Everything is Chaos, Everything's an Illusion, Prison or Mistake, Evil is Necessary and so I'm Evil, Existence is Unknowable, Irrational, and Sublime, Forbidden Wisdom is the Truest Source of Power, I am All, Indulgence is Nature's Only Law, Might is Right, One-Way Trip to Oblivion, People Are Shit, Rebellion is the Road to Transcendence, We are Stormtroopers of the Abyss

Associated Abilities: Cosmology, Enigmas, Subterfuge

Common Instruments: Atrocity, artwork, blood and fluids, bones and remains, books and periodicals, brews and concoctions, cannibalism, celestial alignments, circles and designs (that would drive most people crazy), cybernetic implants, perversion, cups and vessels, dance and movement, devices and machines (fearsome ones, at that!), drugs and poisons, elements (typically black fire which casts no light, or water manifesting as thick, black, lightless ooze), eve contact, fashion (mad!), formulae and math (of the non-Euclidian variety), group rites, languages (generally ones lost or unknown to human history), meditation (on ineffable horrors), music, offerings and sacrifices (preferably live, and painful as possible), ordeals and exertions, sex and sensuality, symbols (which haunt a sane mind to behold), thought-forms, torment, transgression, violation, voice and vocalizations, weapons (of awful design), writings, inscriptions, and runes (ominous ones which seem familiar and vet disturbing.)

#### The Black Mass

A fixture of Western occult lore, the infamous Black Mass combines blood libel, lurid fantasia, paranoid terror-mongering, and authentic cultural traditions mulched into a bloody stew which — as such stews often do — inspires real-life atrocities and backlash behavior. Typically identified with inverted Catholicism, the tradition predates Christianity, reaches

across cultural and religious spectrums, and is used to justify all manner of hideous persecution.

Traditionally speaking, a Black Mass (by any name) features deliberate, profane, and often sexual inversions of the dominant culture's sacred rituals. Blood, shit, and sexual fluids are de rigour, and invocations to demons and so forth get mixed in with backward prayers, violated holy symbols, and other acts of theatrical blasphemy. Given the pervasive misogyny and queerphobia inherent in many religious traditions, Black Masses usually involve women, homosexual acts, cross-dressing, and often all of the above - not as authentic reflections of queer sexuality but as shock tactics meant to upset the status quo. Babies and children (symbolizing innocence and the future), virgins (sexual innocence and social property), and animals (food and companionship) tend to be sacrificed during an archetypal Black Mass, again as a gesture of intentional atrocity. In Catholic lore, a deviant priest was essential to the rite, if only to perform the act of transubstantiation (turning the Eucharist into the body of Christ) in order to profane Christ in person as well as in deed. Non-Catholic takes on the rite tend to include the torturous sacrifice of faithful innocents. Generally, whatever outrages the local culture most is supposedly common practice in a legendary Black Mass.

The roots of such mythologies can be found in the Old Testament's justifications for slaughtering "those people" for violating the laws of God and man. Romans accused Jews and Christians of similar atrocities and - as Christianity split off from Judaism and eventually assumed the patronage of Rome - Christians leveled the same accusations at Jews and pagans. The Catholic Church used Black Mass rumors as fuel for massacres, Crusades, and Inquisitions waged against non-Catholic Christians, and the Eastern Orthodox Church conducted similar purges of Catholics within their dominions. When Christianity fractured into warring factions of Catholic and Protestant forces during the European Renaissance, all sides worked their partisans into frenzies of sadistic mass murder by accusing one another (plus any Jews, Muslims, and holdover pagans unfortunate enough to be within reach at the time) of exactly the same crimes under slightly different names. Historically speaking, the infamous "Burning Times" were less a pogrom against pagan witchcraft than they were campaigns of religious sectarian warfare. Regardless of accuser and accused, the charges were almost inevitably the same: blah-blah-sex-blah-blood, poop and sexual fluids-blah-blah-naked-women-blah-blah-sacrificing children to [fill in the name of said demon lord here]. And just as inevitably, those charges led to people being killed in as horrific a method as the local torturers could devise. Let's hear it for the forces of righteousness. Or something.

Inevitably, these lurid myths inspired real people to act out those atrocities. And because the histories were written by the accusers (most of whom made pretty pennies off the tortures and deaths of the accused), it's impossible to know just how much Black Mass legendry was based on actual rites, and how much of it was invented by people making bank off

the accusations in question. Did the Templars *really* practice Baphometian abominations? Was Gilles de Rias a child-raping murderer? Were French courtiers conducting Black Masses during the affair of the poisons? Or were some, all, or none of those accounts fabricated by people who stood to profit from the results? Honestly, we don't know. The histories are unreliable, and everyone who knew the truth (at least in our world) has long since died. The World of Darkness assumes that at least a few of those accounts were true; in real history, most — if not all — of them probably were not.

Muddying the waters further, the Catholic Church had – and probably still has – *malediction Masses*: ceremonies in which a priest directs God's wrath at his target of choice, using a "darker" form of traditional rites. Adding to the confusion, Victorian hucksters invented "old-time horrorshows" to thrill their audiences. Dungeons were constructed, torture devices invented, and accounts exaggerated or fabricated outright, in an effort to "expose the terrors of a superstitious bygone age," in contrast to the "civilized" behavior of the 1800s. By the 21st century, many of those myths have been historically debunked, yet remain (like the Iron Maiden, which didn't exist in medieval dungeons) touchstones of popular culture despite the research and evidence against them.

And yet, some people do conduct Black Masses, if only to mock religious authorities. Most of those affairs are calculated spectacles which emphasize sex and blasphemy while doing away with ritual murder. A few people do work human and animal sacrifice into the mix, though, either because of ancestral traditions, malignant intent, or both. So, which came first: the ritual or the myth? Again, who knows? People are capable of all kinds of awful things, and the Black Mass mythology is rooted – one way or another – in real-life evil. Nephandi, of course, are huge fans of such evil. Some accuse innocent people of Black Masses and use those accusations as an instrument for social-influence rituals; others employ Black Masses as recruiting tools and atrocity outlets for malcontent dregs. Groups like the Golden Bull employ Black Masses for moral derangement and blackmail material, while Goakids and Infernalists celebrate such Masses just because. As an instrument, then, a Black Mass is a rite of calculated blasphemy and symbolic inversion, aimed at malign goals and focusing corruption through sinister mythology. Associated Paradigms: All Power Comes from Sin, Cosmic Horror is the Only Truth, Evil is Necessary and so I'm Evil, Everyone's Against Me, Forbidden Wisdom is the Truest Source of Power, Indulgence is Nature's Only Law, Might is Right, People are Shit, Rebellion is the Road to Transcendence, We are Stormtroopers of the Abyss

Associated Abilities: Esoterica (Catholic Ritual, Demonology, Enochian, High Ritual, Ritual Blasphemy), Intimidation, Occult, Subterfuge, Theology, Vice

Common Instruments: Atrocity (religious outrages), blood and fluids (the fouler, the better), bones and remains, books and periodicals (defiled scriptures), brews and concoctions, circles and designs, perversion (the entire point of a

Black Mass), cups and vessels, dance and movement, drugs and poisons, group rites, languages (Latin, Hebrew, etc.), music (especially Black Metal), offerings and sacrifices (preferably living innocents), ordeals and exertions, sex and sensuality (deliberately perverse), symbols (inverted religious symbols), transgression, voice and vocalizations, weapons (especially theatrical knives)

#### Demonism

You know all that faux-medieval demon-raising shit you see in heavy metal videos or read about in the *Kalevala*? Turns out, some people actually do that stuff. Stuck at the crossroads between Gutter Magick, Dark Paganism, High Ritual Magick, and the Goetia (below), the catch-all practice of demonism strikes unabashedly Infernal pacts and channels the searing essence of Hell. To command such devilish Arts, a practitioner delves into forbidden grimoires (authentic and otherwise) and melds his renegade will with the might of dark forces from outside the mortal realm.

Does that snarky description mean they're not serious or formidable in their own way? Not at all.

The roots of demonism reach back to the earliest magickal practices — all the way back, if you believe their devotees, to the creation of humankind. According to legend, early humans hooked up with demons, had children with them, and learned forbidden secrets from their infernal mates. Modern humanity, some demonists will tell you, is descended from those human-demon hybrids (the *laham* mentioned in Chapter Three), and our fabulous accomplishments come by way of that infernal heritage. The demonism practice, then, harkens back to the wellspring of human accomplishment and is, they say, the purest form of magick.

"Pure" may be a misnomer. Demonism is inherently predatory, seizing power from others in order to elevate one's self. If the "others" in question are demonic spirits, the devotee bargains with them to get what he wants; if those others happen to be fellow humans or lesser mortal creatures, they become fodder for the demonologist and his allied entities. Although the practitioner works to increase his inner capacities as well (demons have no respect for weakness), that mage draws most of his power and influence by feeding on energy, influence, goods, and flesh taken from his mortal prey, supplementing it with demonic gifts and Investments (detailed earlier) when necessary. Demonism, like the Black Mass, is diametrically opposed to what most folks consider purity.

Demonism rites and spells are, by nature, bloody and disturbing. The practitioner needs not only to please his infernal allies but also prove his value as a predator among predators. Weird sigils and primordial runes invoke the oldest (some sources claim pre-human) languages in order to focus Otherworldly energies through material tools: weapons, altars, vessels, armor, summoning circles, wards, and other instruments fashioned to advance the demonist's needs and please the Lords of Hell.



Who are those lords, then, and from what hell do they hail? There's no single answer to that question. Many demonists serve the satanic legions of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic lore, while others point to the Sumerian entities who inspired those cosmologies, the elemental fiends of Northern Europe, hostile kami and yokai, rapacious spirit-monsters, or the gibbering horrors which predate human consciousness and await the imminent return of this world to their dominion. A few — especially those who hold secretly demonic allegiance in the halls of the Traditions and Technocracy — dismiss all that theological nonsense and consider their "demons" to be extradimensional or extraterrestrial alien beings. Whatever the source of these infernal power might be, the demonists agree that it has no patience with human frailties. Either one seizes power, or one becomes food for those who will.

Associated Paradigms: A World of Gods and Monsters, All Power Comes from Sin, Ancient Wisdom is the Key, Barbarism is the Truest State of Man, Cosmic Horror is the Only Truth, Evil is Necessary and so I'm Evil, Everyone's Against Me, Existence is Unknowable, Irrational, and Sublime, Forbidden Wisdom is the Truest Source of Power, Indulgence is Nature's Only Law, Might is Right, Only the Strongest Deserve to Survive, Rebellion is the Road to Transcendence, Turning the Keys to Reality, We are Stormtroopers of the Abyss

Associated Abilities: Cosmology, Esoterica (Demonology, Enochian, High Ritual, Goetia, Umbrood Protocols, Ritual Pentacles, Ritual Names), Intimidation, Lore (Demons), Occult, Subterfuge, Weird Science (Alien Technologies, Alternate Dimensions, Extra-Dimensional Entities), Subterfuge

Common Instruments: Atrocity (in the demon's name), blood and fluids (demons love that stuff), bones and remains, books and periodicals (especially old grimoires), brews and concoctions, celestial alignments, circles and designs (of eldritch or Goetic nature), perversion (notoriously, the Black Mass), cups and vessels, dance and movement, drugs and poisons, elements (often related to the demon in question), formulae and math (precise geometry), group rites, languages (Latin, Hebrew, Greek, Sanskrit, Arabic, Mandarin, Enochian, Sumerian, etc.), meditation (to attain the proper mindset), music, offerings and sacrifices (preferably live, and painful as possible), ordeals and exertions (such rites tend to be strenuous, and may require offerings of the caster's blood), sex and sensuality, symbols (arcane demonic glyphs), thought-forms (daemonic entities), transgression, voice and vocalizations, weapons (ritual blades especially), writings, inscriptions, and runes (often unbearably complex)

#### **Feralism**

In the beginning, it is said, early humans sought power from the predators who hunted them. Adopting the brute skills and metaphysical essence of their hunters, these people allowed weak humanity to survive the long nights and fear-crazed days when humans cowered in the shadows of larger, stronger beasts. As thanks, their tribes gifted those courageous hunters and shamans with food, slaves, lovers, and devotion. In time, however, weaker people learned to cultivate crops and prey on weaker animals. Populations grew, and the people grew soft, depending upon their old protectors in times of war but otherwise shunting them off to the sides and considering them too harsh and brutal for

civilized company. Among those strong and proud enough to claim them, though, the old secrets remain. Feralism, the magick of cave and savannah, is the preserve of such Arts.

Essentially a cross between the practices of Animalism, Dominion, Shamanism, and Invigoration, feralism exalts Predatory Man and claims metaphysical power from the spiritual essence of charismatic megafauna: wolves, bears, stags, lions, eagles, mammoths, saber-tooth cats, rhinos, crocodiles, and the like. Not all of those animals are predators from a scientific perspective, but they exude a primordial excellence that feralists revere. Accordingly, these practitioners choose a beast to model themselves upon and then shape their bodies and behaviors accordingly. As a magickal practice, they draw upon the essence of that animal (or, for eclectic feralists, several animals) for their metaphysical powers, channeling the spiritual energies and forbidden secrets of that predatory beast.

In itself, feralism isn't malevolent; in the hands of a Fallen mage or devotee, however, the practice becomes explicitly predatory. The Nephandic feralist doesn't draw upon Wolf's devotion to the pack but upon his ability to rip your guts out and eat them raw... and his right to do so whenever possible simply because you're weak. It's *intention*, not *origin*, that makes this practice so potentially evil. Especially in the modern world, where people have become so disconnected from the natural world that we idolize our misperceptions about it rather than its realities, feralism becomes a nature-based excuse for people to act like human assholes, not like the beasts they supposedly revere.

Feralist mages don't build robots or perform sophisticated rites; instead, they transform their bodies into fang-and-claw war machines; invoke shadows, silence and darkness to conceal them; command lesser animals; and assume the fearsome aspect of a predator among her prey. In that regard, this practice can be considered a malign approach to the Animalism practice - specifically Invoking the Beast-Self, Invoking the Essence, and Taking the Essence. (See The Book of Secrets, p. 201.) Even so, the elements of social domination, spiritual communion, and physical prowess are essential to this sort of magick, too. There's no place for technology or civilized behavior in this practice, and its adherents tend to have the Background: Totem and Merits like Acute Senses and Berserker, as well as Flaws like Anachronism and Feral Mind, in addition to their magickal Arts. Draped in skins and snarling like a beast, a feralist devotee evokes the earliest imaginings of man...or acts out her impressions of what she thinks those primordial people were like, anyway.

Associated Paradigms: Ancient Wisdom is the Key, Barbarism is the Truest State of Man, Cosmic Horror is the Only Truth, Creation is Divine (or Demonic) and Alive, Everything is Chaos, Evil is Necessary and so I'm Evil, Existence is Unknowable, Irrational, and Sublime, Forbidden Wisdom is the Truest Source of Power, I'm a Predator, and the World is My Prey, Indulgence is Nature's Only Law, Might is Right, Only the Strongest Deserve to Survive, People Are Shit, We are Meant to be Wild, We are Stormtroopers of the Abyss

Associated Abilities: Animal Kinship, Athletics, Brawl, Hunting, Intimidation, Stealth, Survival

Common Instruments: Atrocity (bestial massacres), blood and fluids, bodywork, body modification, bones and remains, cannibalism, dance and movement (mimicking beasts), drugs and poisons (to bring out the beast), eye contact (predatory domination), fashion (skins, furs, nudity, archaic clothes, animalistic garb), food and drink (hearts and innards of the prey), group rites (for running with a pack), mutilation, offerings and sacrifices (again, usually live), ordeals and exertions (primal shapeshifting often involves painful rites and transformations), sex and sensuality (fuck like a beast; also, animals tend to be sensual by nature), social domination ("alpha-ing" your peers and prey), thought-forms (the astral- mental "beast-self"), weapons (fashioned to function like claws, teeth, tails, etc.)

#### Goetia

Drawn from linguistic roots that mean — depending on how you translate them — "howling," "lamenting," "charismatic," "hex," "to call," and "to scream like a beast," the controversial practice of Goetia has long been a cornerstone at the shadows of the Western occult ritual tradition. The fact that certain sources trace the word *grammar* to *Goetia* by way of the French *gramaire* (which means both "learning" and "incantations") makes school seem a lot more interesting. Words can be tricky things, and that's especially true when you're talking about Goetia.

Depending on who you ask (even Hermetic magi have passionate debates about the subject), Goetic magick is the Solomonic Art of summoning and binding demons through God's forbidden keys to the universe; a psychological practice which envisions "demons" as Jungian archetypes of desired principles or the hidden shadows of the mage's own psyche; the ritualized versions of primordial spirit-rites from the Middle East and Mediterranean region; the gateway to Qlippothic realms, entities, and energies; an ancient form of necromancy that invokes aid from sinister spirits; a cloak for pre-human rituals that have been preserved and translated throughout the eons; an elaborate hoax that has trolled would-be mages since the medieval era; or an arcane conflux of some or all of them.

Magick is rarely straightforward, and Goetic magick is less straightforward than usual. What is consistent about the various definitions of this esoteric practice is its sinister reputation. Among occultists, Goetia is considered precarious at best. The entities associated with the practice are among the most ominous names in the infernal pandemonium, with a storied history of corrupting and destroying those who dare to work with such unpredictable forces.

"The Goetia" is also the name given to the classic demonologist grimoire *The Lesser Key of Solomon*, and frequently gets applied to the source of those entities: a literally howling realm formed from the cast-off fragments of God's previous creations. Many sources consider this source to be the Qlippoth itself, but

not all authorities do. Confusion, debate, and inconsistency are characteristics of Goetia; in every description and definition, an innate sense of confusion appears to seep in from the source of the practice itself. Goetia, then, is a challenge to the occultist. Sorting out the strands of contradiction and forming them into a coherent metaphysical practice is part of the discipline associated with this Art.

In practical terms, Goetia is a disreputable form of High Ritual Magick. Elaborate sigils and complex rites invoke and command ferocious entities whose penchant for treachery makes this a perilous sort of magick. Any mage must be disciplined in his craft, but a Goetian practitioner need a strong will, a keen mind, constant focus, and guile worthy of a freelance arms dealer. Through Goetia, a magus commands chthonic beings whose powers dwarf his own. If he isn't smarter and more stubborn than they are, he'll soon become their lunch.

Along with mental discipline, quick wits, and a crazed disregard for his own safety, a Goetic magus needs to be precise in his applications of the Art. A wrong word or misdrawn diagram can have disastrous consequences. The section about "Summoning, Bargaining, Binding, and Warding" in How Do You DO That? (pp. 90-106) covers the in-game specifics for this sort of spellcraft, and the optional rule "A Bit of Spirit?" in the same book (p. 16) applies to Goetic workings even when no monumental summonings prove necessary. Necromancy, prophecy, divination, elemental mastery, social influence, and an ability to find hidden things or hide yourself are all associated with Goetia as well; in all cases, however, the magus needs time to cast a ritual and properly invoke and command the right spirit for the task. Goetia, then, is not a quick-fix sort of magick, and works as a fighting tactic only if the practitioner can invoke a demon or two and then send them after his target from a safe distance away.

When things go wrong in this practice, they go wrong in spectacular fashion. Paradox backlashes for Goetic rituals almost always involve "Paradox Nightmares" that manifest from the Goetia and teach the magus the error of his ways. Applications that view Goetic entities as psychological constructions bring on deep Quiets (as per Mage 20, pp. 554-561), filled with hobgoblins and hellish mindscapes, instead of physical punishment.

Regardless of the form it takes when things go poorly, Goetia remains infamous and tricky at best. Thus, masters of this practice are rare, crafty, tainted with sinister Resonance, and marked by the essence of deeply forbidden things.

Associated Paradigms: A World of Gods and Monsters, All Power Comes from Sin, Ancient Wisdom is the Key, Bring Back the Golden Age!, Cosmic Horror is the Only Truth, Everything is Chaos, Everything's an Illusion, Prison or Mistake, Existence is Unknowable, Irrational, and Sublime, Forbidden Wisdom is the Truest Source of Power, Indulgence is Nature's Only Law, One-Way Trip to Oblivion, Rebellion is the Road to Transcendence, We are Stormtroopers of the Abyss

Associated Abilities: Academics, Art (Sigils and Diagrams), Cosmology, Enigmas, Esoterica (Goetia, Demonology, Enochian, Kabbalah, Left-Hand Path, Ritual Pentacles, Ritual Names), High Ritual, Lore (Demons), Research, Occult

Common Instruments: Blood and fluids, bones and remains, books and periodicals (Goetic tomes), celestial alignments, circles and designs, perversion (again, the Black Mass), cups and vessels, dance and movement, drugs and poisons, elements, formulae and math, group rites, languages (Latin, Hebrew, Greek, Sanskrit, Arabic, Mandarin, Enochian, Sumerian, etc.), meditation, music, offerings and sacrifices, ordeals and exertions, sex and sensuality, symbols (Goetic sigils), thought-forms (Goetic and /or memetic entities), transgression, voice and vocalizations, weapons (again, ritual blades), writings, inscriptions, and runes (Goetic designs)

### Infernal Sciences

Science has no moral sense. The same principles that power cities can be used to obliterate them. Ethical technologies, then, require ethical people and societies to use them. Guided by predators dedicated to oblivion, science crafts horrifying things.

Nephandic technology is all *about* crafting horrifying things.

The word *Infernal* refers to something "from below." Grafted onto *science*, that term could refer to hellish technologies; undermining scientific advancements; things that are "below science" in an ethical sense; or a science which opens up vistas (as Lovecraft put it) to the fathomless Abyss of pure unfiltered Reality. All of these interpretations suit the Nephandic approach to reality-warping technology. Although the infernal sciences practice is essentially the Hypertech practice with bad intentions, those intentions guide the shape of that technology and the goals of the people who use it.

Such science assumes many forms: war machines of especially cruel design; biological warfare agents; torture machines; invasive cybernetics that distort organic life into horrifying new configurations; extradimensional explorations and portals which rip open the boundaries of earthly existence and introduce hostile alien influences; theories and teachings (eugenics, racial purism, intentionally predatory economic practices, etc.) designed to keep people hateful, divided, and scared; weapons of mass destruction; artificial lifeforms, robots, cyborgs, and so forth crafted with malignant purpose and violent intentions; medical research involving vivisection, torture testing, and other forms of mutilation and mutation "in the name of science"; subversion of social and personal relationships through the internet and other mass media; malign manipulation through drugs, mechanical and electronic devices, and psychological processes designed to tear apart minds and personalities. The possibilities are limited only by the human imagination, which, as we've seen by now, is pretty fiendish even without the involvement of Nephandi.



As a Fallen practice in Mage, Infernal Science reflects the practices of Cybernetics, Hypertech, and Weird Science directed toward intentionally harmful ends. The practices of Craftwork, Dominion, Hypereconomics, Psionics and Reality Hacking could be considered Infernal Sciences too, if the practitioner uses those techniques to focus intentionally harmful Effects. In game terms, this practice is a catch-all category for malignant technomancers whose approach to Enlightened Science involves using gadgets and principles of modernistic (as opposed to archaic) technomagick. If a Nephandic computer whiz employs online social media instead of sigils drawn in blood in order to advance her corrupting agenda through 21st-century technology, that's infernal science. Other examples could include the mad scientist building Nazi Thule warbots, the bio-grafting demon-maker, and the poison-crafter brewing bioweapons in her state-of-the-art chemistry lab. "Infernal technology," then, is shorthand for a wide array of malignant technomagick.

Associated Paradigms: Aliens Made Us What We Are, Consciousness is the Only True Reality, Cosmic Horror is the Only Truth, Embrace the Threshold, Everyone's Against Me, Everything is Chaos, Everything is Data, Evil is Necessary and so I'm Evil, Existence is Unknowable, Irrational, and Sublime, Forbidden Wisdom is the Truest Source of Power, Holographic Reality, I am All, I'm a Predator, and the World is My Prey, Might is Right, Only the

Strongest (or Most Brilliant) Deserve to Survive, People Are Shit, Rebellion is the Road to Transcendence, Tech Holds All the Answers, Transcend Your Limits

Associated Abilities: Biotech, Computer, Crafts (any), Firearms, Gunsmith, Hypertech, Jury-Rigging, Mass Media, Medicine, Newspeak, Science, Weird Science, Technology

Common Instruments: Armor, atrocity (modern science is really good at those!), body modification, brain-computer interface, computer gear, cybernetic implants, devices and machines, drugs and poisons, formulae and math (of horrific complexity), gadgets and inventions, genetic manipulation, internet activity, labs and gear, languages (Latin, Greek, Arabic, Japanese, Mandarin, Hindi, etc.), management and HR, mass media, medical procedures, money and wealth, mutilation, nanotech, social domination, trolling and cyberbullying, vehicles, weapons

### Vamamarga

The infamous Left-Hand Path of Tantra is a primary practice for Ecstatics and Thanatoics both Fallen and otherwise, and a vital element of many modern antinomian practices, as well. As with Tantra itself, the Vamamarga is not in itself malignant; in many applications, its precepts of pancha-tattva ("the Five Ms") are antithetical only to certain rigid orthodoxies of Hindu and Buddhist traditions. For most magickal practices, those proscribed elements — madya

(wine), mamsa (meat), matsya (fish), mudra (cereal, though the word also means "hand symbols"), and maithuna (sexual intercourse) — are perfectly acceptable, even desirable.

The infamous Aghori take things much further than that, though. And while a devotee of the Aghor ("without terror") Path is not immediately evil, certain elements of that Path (notably rape and cannibalism) are justifiably considered pretty damn evil anyway. When a mage undertakes such a practice, he's a shade or two away from the Fall, and may wind up in the Cauls without much persuasion otherwise.

At the Aghor level of Vamamarga, laws and taboos get violated in an effort to tear down cultural and spiritual preconceptions and return the practitioner to a state of death as a child: beyond fear of mortal pain, mortal death, mortal fear and constraint. A child, to the Aghori perspective, "will play with shit as readily as he plays with toys," and learns to fear death through experience with pain. The Vamamarga helps the devotee unlearn such limitations, ultimately returning him to a childlike state...one reached, paradoxically, through what other people consider sin... and to ultimate reunion with the primordial Void.

In game terms, the Vamamarga is a hybrid of the practices: Crazy Wisdom and Yoga, featuring extreme instruments like Blood and Fluids, Bones and Remains, Cannibalism, Sex and Sensuality, Weapons, and, of course, Transgression; the worst of them add Perversion, Torment, Violation, and more to that mix. Aghori practitioners generally *aren't* Nephandi, but to folks without a cultural understanding of Indian Tantric traditions they can look pretty damn evil. Naked or nearly so, Aghori devotees live in and around gravesites and rivers, often painted white, yellow, or other vivid hues. Skulls are their bowls and cups, bones form their jewelry, and apparent insanity is their normal behavior. Some Aghori respect women, viewing them as embodiments of the revered feminine force Shakti. Nephandic Aghori respect no one, and revere only themselves.

Associated Paradigms: All Power Comes from Sin, Ancient Wisdom is the Key, Barbarism is the Truest State of Man, Consciousness is the Only True Reality, Cosmic Horror is the Only Truth, Everything is Chaos, Creation is Divine (or Demonic) and Alive, Everything's an Illusion, Prison or Mistake, Existence is Unknowable, Irrational, and Sublime, Forbidden Wisdom is the Truest Source of Power, Indulgence is Nature's Only Law, Only the Strongest Deserve to Survive, Rebellion is the Road to Transcendence, Transcend Your Limits

Associated Abilities: Athletics, Esoterica (Tantra, sutras, yoga, Left-Hand Path, Right-Hand Path), Intimidation, Medicine, Meditation (a core Ability for this practice), Survival

Common Instruments: Blood and fluids, bodywork, body modification, bones and remains, cannibalism, dance and movement (wild frenzies, yoga postures), drugs and poisons, fashion (near or total nakedness, body paint, long matted, dreadlocked or wild hair), food and drink (foul foodstuffs, intoxicating drinks), mutilation, offerings and sacrifices, ordeals and exertions (this is a physically rigorous practice),

### Tantra

A subject of endless and often recursive complexity (even lifetime practitioners disagree vehemently about what it truly involves), the term *Tantra* covers an array of Hindu and Buddhist practices. Is it a religion? A philosophy? A toolkit of different but related practices? People disagree, occasionally to the point of violence, about that. For certain, though, Tantra is far more than the sexual bag-of-tricks that usually come to mind when folks outside of Asia employ that word. Although some practitioners refer to that erotic aspect as *Western Tantra*, Tantra itself covers a wide and paradoxically divergent range of techniques whose core purpose relates to the implication of its name: Union.

In its original Sanskrit, tantra means "weave," "loom," and "warp," referring to the interplay of separate threads (different practices and lives) into a single whole cloth (unity between the human individual and a greater whole). The heart of Tantric practices involves uniting and repairing what the human mind perceives as disparate things. Some practitioners use it as a tool of uniting people, gendered energies, or humanity and the gods; others view it as a practical toolkit for bodily health, sexual gratification, spiritual wisdom, or... well, really all of it. Tantra mends emotional and physical wounds, provides religious devotion, leads to a higher state of physical and spiritual and social health. In short, it's pretty much the opposite of the Nephandic approach for chaos and ruin.

So why are we mentioning it here?

Because the often-disreputable "Left-Hand" approach to Tantra (noted in **Mage 20**, p. 574, as a gross simplification created by fascinated outsiders) has a long history with the darker side of Hindu magick and the people who practice forbidden metaphysical Arts.

Although considered dubious by some people (especially those who favor ascetic practices), Tantra is not in any fashion "evil." It does, however, come up a lot in conversations about the Left-Hand Path, and gets used as an excuse for predatory behavior and sexual exploitation conducted under the name of Tantric enlightenment.

perversion (especially of Hindu and Buddhist strictures), sex and sensuality (often in esoteric sexual positions), social domination, violation, weapons (ritual blades, claws, and scarves for strangling victims).

### Malign Instruments

The Fallen are nothing if not flexible. In service to their dark agendas, a Nephandic mage could use any instrument that fits her practice and circumstances. Those who favor technomagick employ the usual high-tech gear, especially if

the Fallen have indeed successfully infiltrated the Technocratic Union, the Adepts and Etherites, or both. And because mass media and the internet have expanded Fallen influence to such a phenomenal extent, social-media tools are essential to any Nephandus who wishes to turn modern reality in her favor. In many ways, though, the Fallen are traditionalists at heart. Their Arts harken back to deep caves, desolate moors, and the bloody halls of ancient empires and forgotten kingdoms, and so many of their tools have eldritch pedigrees as well.

In general, Nephandic mages use most of the same tools and practices that other mages employ. In their hands, however, those tools assume the most disquieting forms possible. Math and Formulae feature brain-cracking counter-rationality; Artwork tends to be disturbing and obscene; Machines have been engineered with malign intentions, while Dance and Movement feature unnerving displays of contortion and dislocation. Although their corrupt nature is generally hidden from public view, such instruments serve destructive ends.

And then there are the tools with no purpose other than destruction — instruments so malignant that they deserve their own entries. There is no innocent aspect to these tools; a hammer can be used to build a house or knock somebody's teeth out, but the following instruments are as one-sided as a firebomb tossed through your bedroom window...and as volatile, too.

The following instruments are *seriously* bad juju. Although rooted in real-life occult practices, they're tools of the blackest sorts of magick. Non-Fallen mages might employ them, but anyone who does so risks disaster. The "Justice and Influence" section of **The Book of Secrets**, pp. 212-240, details the punishments handed out to mages who get caught doing such things, and the "Resonance" section (pp. 128-138) reveals how malignant energies follow malignant acts of magick.

From a roleplaying standpoint, every one of the following instruments constitutes a potential trigger zone, with effects that should probably be left offstage if these tools are deployed at all. Storytellers are advised to black out the gruesome details when these horrors come into play, perhaps showing the moments before and the aftermath following their use. *No one* should use these instruments without profound consequences in the story, and those who choose such tactics are rightly despised for the outrages they commit.

For more about high-risk material in your games, see "Playing on the Knife's Edge," pp. XX-XX.

### **Atrocity**

There's energy in fear. Vitality in rage. The moment of awestruck horror when someone beholds something so abominable that their entire view of reality tilts...that moment holds profound degrees of power. Those who seek that level of power, damn the consequences involved, may harness one of the most devastating tools in human experience: *atrocity*, a weapon of kings so potent that it echoes through history long after the event itself has passed.

Death is easy. Torture, worse but commonplace enough to have become a form of entertainment. A true atrocity demands not only scope and scale but imagination. Ed Gein's severed-limb furniture. Multitudes of empty shoes from people turned to ash, lampshades, and human soap. Any idiot can mow people down with machine-gun fire; a connoisseur of atrocity buries children up to their necks in the playground and then runs over them with a riding mower. Few people, even those willing to kill, can unleash such memorable carnage. True atrocities shock even those people who think they've seen everything, and so the psychic force of the deed reverberates from the moment of the killing to the horror of its spectators and the fascination of those who hear about it long after that deed is done. That force, in turn, can be shaped by intention into a memorable act of magick — the transformation of reality through force of will.

As an instrument of focus, atrocity takes time, planning, and preparation. Rituals, not fast-cast spells, are the province of atrocity. Countess Bathory devoted whole nights to her torturous rituals, and General Butt Naked could spend a day or more on each protective rite. Although some practitioners prefer to get their hands dirty, others rely upon allies and servants. Osama Bin Ladin committed his history-changing rite from half a world away, though few Nephandi could command the resources and patience required for such a glorious atrocity.

When committed with magickal intent, atrocities tend to focus spells of influence, energy, and spiritual significance — in game terms, the Spheres of Mind, Prime, and Spirit. Summoning rituals (as described in How Do You DO That? pp. 90-106) may involve atrocities if the magus wants to impress an especially potent entity or tear open a portal to infernal Realms. Vile Nodes swell up in places where atrocities take place, and vast tides of Quintessential energy can be unleashed and harvested by a skillful practitioner. (How Do You DO That? pp. 42-51.) Vast crimes make impressions on their audiences, too, which makes atrocity a suitable tool for social rites designed to stir up terrified rage. In all cases, atrocities generate foul Resonance — the kind that follows the responsible parties for years, perhaps forever.

Among the Fallen, atrocity is an art form. A fine one requires a poet's flair for dramatic eloquence. If successful, though, a clever atrocity scores serious status from Nephandic peers. Victims, naturally, are important, with quality being more vital than quantity. Modern weapons make it easy to kill large numbers of people, with news and social media pumping out such mind-numbing body counts that an atrocity has to be really creative before it merits more than a day or two of attention. Thus, a Nephandus who uses atrocity as an instrument must possess the wit to devise it, resources to make it happen, and the ability to get away with it afterward.

That last part is key. Even in a war zone, atrocities make targets of their perpetrators. While bloody-minded people might admire a classical atrocity, these are not the sorts of deeds most people will ever forgive or forget.

### Hypersigils and Egregores

An essential element of cybernetic reality hacking, memetics (p. XX), and media-based chaos magick, hypersigils are essentially Mythic Treads of the Information Age. (See Mage 20, p. 61, p. 503, p. 530, p. 588, and p. 603.) Coined by graphic-novel author Grant Morrison, the concept of the hypersigil takes a work of media (a song, a blog, an image, etc.) and invests so much psychic energy into it that the work assumes a sort of sentience and personality which allow that work to become far more significant than it had initially been: a self-willed thought-form known as a tulpa or egregore. Once activated, the hypersigil serves its creator but also itself — the creator by working as a magickal instrument, itself by gathering more psychic energy to sustain itself... and to grow.

Although not malignant by nature, hypersigils may become dangerous. Esoteric author Valentin Tomberg points out that egregores are selfish, hungry, and intent on gaining energy and power...typically at the expense of the world at large.

In **Mage** terms, a hypersigil is an instrument of focus that combines Artwork, Mass Media, and Thought-Forms (detailed in **Mage 20**, Chapter Ten, under the entries of those names). With it, a media-working mage can focus the Chaos Magick and Reality Hacking practices through media venues like comics, film, and the internet.

That instrument, however, can attain its own personality... perhaps several separate personalities, if the influence of that sigil becomes large enough to support several separate entities. In game terms, the hypersigil becomes one or more characters under the Storyteller's control. Each character has its own ideas about its identity, and as they become more potent and influential, those characters diverge from the mage's original creation and become their own people entirely. Essentially, a hypersigil becomes a spiritual Frankenstein's Monster – subject to its creator's commands up to a point, but with its own agendas and feelings about being used that way.

Most hypersigils exist only in the Digital Web. A few wander through the Penumbra or inhabit High Umbral Realms. A handful of especially powerful ones such as Baphomet can manifest physically as well, like potent Avatars, and spirits with the *Materialize* Charm. Postmodern occultists speculate that all gods are actually hypersigils who attained sentience long ago, thanks to art, mythology, and religious rituals. Does this mean that reality hackers and the internet are generating the next generation of gods? That ominous question has no firm answer...yet.

### Perversion

"Facing the wrong way." A pretty innocuous term. And considering that it's been applied to everything from homosexuality to the most gruesome murder, we can honestly say that perversion is usually in the eye of the beholder.

Usually.

In the hands of Nephandi, perversion as a magickal instrument involves things that make even the most open-minded liberal reach for brain bleach and a flamethrower.

We are *not* going into details here. Suffice to say that if it turns your stomach, Nephandi consider that a win.

From a metaphysical perspective, inversion of the expected order is a potent instrument in its own right. (See "Transgression" in **The Book of Secrets**, p. 209, "Contrary" in **Mage 20**, p. 24, and "Crazy Wisdom" in **Mage 20**, p. 576) Perversion, in the Nephandic sense, takes inversion and transgression past the point of no return. At this level, the magus isn't simply turning things sideways; lives are shattered, souls poisoned, laws and customs annihilated...*all for the sake of a ritual or spell*. Among Traditions, Technocracy, and Disparates alike, such deeds are unforgiveable. Among the Fallen, they're just business as usual.

Like Atrocity, this tool traditionally focuses rites dedicated to influence and energy on the physical and metaphysical planes; by the same token, sexual magicks tend to focus magicks of Life and Time as well, and so perversions that involve sexuality (not all of them do) work with those Spheres too. Because perversions break things down in a radical manner, they make excellent tools for destructive Entropy-based spells. Although it's not traditionally associated with lifeless matter, elemental forces, or temporal flux, the entire point of perversion involves declaring all limitations null and void.

Committed with magickal intentions, a perversion deliberately smashes things people consider sacred. Shitting on altars is the shallow end of this sort of thing, with the severity growing bolder and more unhinged from there. By smashing conventions to bits, the Fallen mage channels shock and outrage into a formidable psychic instrument while demonstrating that nothing is sacred or forbidden to her.

#### **Mutilation**

To cut something apart is to rearrange its identity, transforming it from what it was to what you make of it. To cut someone apart is to do the same thing on a greater level of severity. And so, throughout times and cultures, mutilation of the self and of others provides a traditional method of changing the subject's physical identity and metaphysical nature. The Christ's mutilations hold such significance that some Christians actually venerate them and wish (in an abstract sense, at least) to suffer those wounds themselves in order to become more Christlike. Tattoos, cybernetics, piercings, blood-lettings...really, those are all traditional forms of change through mutilation.



The Fallen employ them...and then, as always, take them past the point where others turn away.

Self-flayings and the skinning of others. Ritual dismemberments. Gouging of eyes, ripping of tongues, grotesque torments of flesh redesign: Nephandi do such things, and much, much worse.

Pain, as detailed below, is a big part of such antics. The real significance of ritual mutilation, though, is the way it marks, in a permanent fashion, the threshold between what was and what is now. By performing such transformations, the mage takes control of the situation and remakes it to his satisfaction. An act of mastery over flesh, psyche, and bone, mutilation sets imagination into living form.

Most obviously associated with Life magicks, this instrument reworks the Mind and Spirit, too. Severe trauma reaches beyond mere physical pain, supposedly opening brief doorways of perception and existence. The subject's survival depends upon the whims and skill of the person who's making the alterations, the conditions it's done under, and the subject's will to survive the process. Magick, of course, can preserve the subject's life under even the worst conditions; whether he'd want to keeping living afterward is a different matter entirely.

#### **Torment**

Torture is more mental than physical. A mind can work around mere pain. The act of skillful torment involves commanding the reality of the person on the receiving end. As demonstrated in films like *Martyrs* and *Antichrist*, torture can provide impressive focus for metaphysical intentions... and from the roasting of heretics to the vivisection tables of Nankeen, it has done so for centuries.

Like the other instruments above, torment transforms reality to fit the demands of the person changing it. The victim becomes the canvas for the torturer's intentions. By turning pain into an instrument, the torturer makes a rather vivid impression, not just on the subject of the pain but on everyone who witnesses it as well. In the old days, rulers and clergy used public torture and gruesome remains to command devoted and obedient fear, satisfy bloodlusting crowds, and establish domination over the multitudes. In modern times, public torture – though frowned upon officially – has become a vicarious form of arousal and entertainment. Folks search the internet for "the real thing" and exorcise personal demons by watching simulated torment where we know the pain's not real. In fetish culture, consensual torment stokes endorphins, alters minds, and allows the people involved to vicariously live out dramas and sort through real-life wounds in negotiated settings where all parties are at least theoretically in control.

The Nephandi go further than that. As far as their Arts will take them, and then some besides.

The Fallen don't care about consent, respect no limits, and feel no compassion for the ones they harm. In Nephandic hands, torment is a toy, a pastime, a joke with serious undertones. It can be applied to any Sphere, and any spell, so long as the magus has the time and capability of turning pain into a tool and fucking with the head of the person on the receiving end of agony. For while the Fallen Ones get a kick out of the suffering they inflict, they also understand the deeper levels of excruciation—the torturous transformation from one state of being to another. The Technocracy remakes people in the dreaded Room 101, but the Fallen can remake reality itself.

### Trolling and Cyberbullying

In the grand scheme of things, this instrument seems innocuous. I mean, it's not like ripping someone's arms off. Unlike the more extreme measures, though, trolling — deliberately stirring shit up, usually but not necessarily on social media, and then directing said shit at a target — is quick, easy, common, and pervasive in ways that wear the targets down through attrition. Worse, certain acts of trolling can have devastating long-term effects; *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was essentially a 19th-century act of trolling that has inspired at least three genocides since its inception, one of which still stands as the largest such atrocity in human history, the Holocaust.

Trolling involves creating acts of media that are intended to get a rise out of people. That in itself isn't evil, and the tactic can actually be used as a weapon against folks like the Nephandi if done well and with the right intentions. Cyber-bullying, despite its apparently innocuous name, ramps things up by directing social-media resources (memes, hacking, slander, flying monkeys, embarrassment and harassment campaigns, and so forth) against a given target. When committed with intensity, that harassment can wreck careers, drive folks to suicide, unleash law-enforcement raids against innocent people, incite riots, undercut societies, inspire assassinations, and wear down hope and goodwill on a monumental scale. Doxing, mass threats, slanders, "kill yourself" challenges, hate campaigns, Goetic memes, websites and programs dedicated to absurd conspiracies and vitriolic lies...they're all methods of trolling and cyber-bullying that malignant mages can employ.

As a focus instrument, trolling and cyber-bullying combine Mass Media with Writings and Inscriptions (memes, web posts, etc.) or Computer Gear, Group Rites (hate campaigns), Symbols (memes, cartoons), and perhaps Voice and Vocalizations (speeches, videos, etc.). Through those methods, the mage works out Uncanny Influence Effects (detailed in How Do You DO That? pp. 114-136) that can spread lies, undermine ideas, smear reputations, manipulate targets (possibly even, thanks to Mind magick, take people over for short periods of time), incite violence, compel loyalty, and

### Rape is Not a Toy

It shouldn't need saying by now, but I'll say it anyway: Under no circumstances should this kind of shit be roleplayed out. Ever. Especially not on player characters. Unless all of your players have negotiated otherwise, such crimes should be committed offstage if they appear in your story at all.

The violation "instrument" should be used only after prior consultation and the consent of all players. Even then, the *Blackout Rule* (Mage 20, p. 345) is always in force; if someone says, "That's enough," then that's the end of the scene.

Popular entertainment tends to treat rape is as a titillating party favor that lends a story an extra-dramatic kick. It's not. Rape is just what the entry says it is: An intimate violation of a person's identity, based on force and control overpowering consent. The word rape means "to take," and taking is exactly what a rapist does. The ability to shame the target afterward just makes the violation that much stronger.

Yes, violation has a valid dramatic purpose in certain stories. It should never be used, though, as set dressing or cheap motivation. Chances are good that someone in your gaming group — regardless of their gender — has been sexually assaulted at least once in their life. Treating rape lightly demeans the crime itself and insults the people who've lived through it in real life.

otherwise fuck with people, potentially on a huge scale. All without seeming remotely paranormal.

Virtual Adepts and media-savvy Ecstatics have been using these techniques for decades. In Fallen hands, though, and in service to their allies, few methods have been as effective in the information era as dedicated campaigns of hatred and disinformation cloaked in the sentiment "But it's only a joke..."

#### Violation

Nephandi destroy things. That's what they do. And few methods of destruction are as simple yet effective as the most intimate forms of violation: sexual violence, psychic invasion, abuses of mind, body, and soul, performed whenever possible by someone the violated party trusted until that moment. Shock, rage, hate, fear, betrayal, shame...such tools have ancient pedigrees among mages who favor cruelty. Just as physical mutilation transforms the reality and identity of another living thing, so too does intimate violation remake their inner self.

Despite the stigma strapped onto the survivors of such things, these violations have nothing to do with sexual desire or malformed love. They're demonstrations of dominance and control, enforcing the will while dehumanizing the prey. As a magickal tool, such demonstrations strive to break the victim while exalting the perpetrator. That domination drives home the bond between predator and prey, making clear which one of those parties is which.

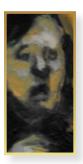
And yet, people endure, survive, and can recover from such abuse. It's not easy, it's not quick, and — contrary to popular entertainment — it rarely involves a gorily satisfying

revenge, lots of casual sex, or both. Recovery is possible. That said, this sort of violation leaves psychic, emotional, social, and sometimes physical scars for years, perhaps for a lifetime.

The Fallen love to destroy.

Refusing to be destroyed keeps the Fallen Ones from winning.

# Malignant Magicks



The bloody beating heart of the matter: What sort of magicks do the Fallen command? In rules terms, they employ the same sorts of magicks other mages command. Despite the metaphysical orientation of the Qlippothic expressions of the nine Spheres, a Nephandic character uses the usual Mage magick-rule systems. The real distinction between these malevolent Consensus-breakers and their Awakened rivals comes through in the way

the Fallen practice magick, the things they do with it, and their callous disregard for the consequences their actions have on other people. Any mage can be a bastard but the Fallen make a point of it.

Thanks to the shoot-on-sight policy most factions maintain with regards to the Fallen, and to their habit of infiltrating other groups and rotting them from within, Nephandic mages cultivate a subtle approach to magick. Spells take the form of social manipulation, explainable phenomena, occasional hypertech (especially in the case of "technephandi"), and various tricks. Oh, each Nephandus worth that name can bust out some hellfire if need be; that sort of thing, however, is a last resort when all other options fail. Because they *do* tend to be so subtle, rival mages often look for the overthellfire approach. If a Fallen mage unleashes such openly infernal magicks, though, it's generally because she has almost nothing left to lose.

Stashed away in covert lairs, the Eaters of the Weak junk all restraint. That's where you'll find the piles of corpses and howling survivors chained up naked in chambers rancid with their own filth. The gory idols of star-lost entities, the fierce machines, the torture tables... those horror-flick accourtements *do* get used, but seldom in public and never around people the Nephandi think will ever see the sun again. In such hidden places, the Fallen go wild. Everything they hold back in everyday life becomes a party favor for festivals of hell.

For the most part, though, Nephandi remain careful about secrecy and the innocuous appearance of their Arts. After all, their lives — and, considering the punishment of Gilgul, their souls — are at stake. A blatant Nephandus is typically a dead Nephandus.

As shown above in the "Malevolent Focus" section, Nephandic mages use a wide range of paradigms, practices, and instruments when casting their spells. The specific elements depend upon the mage, his lifestyle, his beliefs about and approach to magickal Arts, and the ways in which he dedicates himself to advancing his existence at the expense of other people.

### Fallen Spells and Rites

Like all other mages, Nephandi pursue magicks that suit their needs, knowledge, and circumstances. More often than not, their preferred techniques favor social intercourse, energetic parasitism, weird phenomena, uncanny violence, and – for advanced practitioners – the soul-precarious rituals of Otherworldly command.

In game terms, you can find detailed discussions of these Nephandic specialties in the sourcebook How Do You DO That? For detailed discussions of the systems involved, check out the entries (cited more specifically below) about Elemental Mastery, Energy-Work, Enhanced Perceptions, Martial Arts, Necromancy, Summoning, Binding, Bargaining, and Warding, and most especially Uncanny Influence. Although Fallen practitioners can employ any sort of magick their Spheres, Arete and focus allow, those fields represent the approach most favored by Nephandic mages: Examine, seduce, corrupt, destroy — and, for fuck's sake, don't get caught!

A selection of specifically Nephandic spells includes...

# Shroud the Soul (• Mind, •• Prime, or both; possibly with ••• Prime instead)

One of the first and most vital spells a Nephandus learns involves cloaking her aura so as to conceal the true nature of her psyche, emotions, and soul. Traditionally, this involves bathing in the blood of slaughtered innocents, although modern technology and alternate approaches to the Arts have introduced innovations like intense meditations that cleanse the aura, exposure to mysterious rays, Quintessential "baths" of cleaner life force, and the favor of minor demons or spirits who agree to conceal the truth behind that life-force façade.

**System:** In its most basic form, this trick employs Mind 1 mental discipline to block the Fallen One's "true colors" from her aura. Each success on the caster's Arete roll removes one success from the Perception + Awareness roll of any character who's trying to discern that Nephandic aura.

A more demanding version reattunes the caster's aura toward a more innocuous color. The same systems apply to this version of the spell.

Cloaking Resonance is a tad more challenging. This energy (detailed in **The Book of Secrets**, pp. 128-138) reflects the nature of a mage's deeds...which, in the case of Nephandi, can be pretty damned ugly. In order to conceal such metaphysical stains, the Nephandus asserts her will over these metaphysical echoes: A Willpower roll can shroud one dot of Resonance for each success on that Willpower roll. The difficulty for that roll is the character's Resonance Trait + 3; concealing three dots of Resonance, then, would demand at least three successes on a Willpower roll, difficulty 6. This concealment lasts for roughly an hour, after which time the original energy signature becomes obvious again.

The most advanced version of the Shroud uses Prime 4 to "rinse" the mage's aura and Resonance. Each success scored with the Arete roll "cleans" one dot of the character's old Resonance; to purge the taint from four dots of malignant Resonance, then, would demand at least four successes with the caster's Arete roll.

Because auras remain invisible to the average human witness, shrouding one's aura is coincidental magick. Rinsing that aura clear remains coincidental for the first three dots of Resonance, but that task becomes vulgar if the mage tries to cleanse four or five dots of their malignant signature. Once cleansed, however, that energy remains innocuous until the Nephandus commits more atrocities...which, of course, she will.

# Spot the Sucker (• Life or • Mind; possibly with • Entropy added)

Easiest trick in the Nephandic handbook: Look somebody over, spot his weak spots, and use that knowledge to your advantage. By assessing the victim's body language, emotional state, fashion choices, and other cues, a Fallen tempter can tailor her approach for maximum appeal.

System: There's nothing complicated about this spell. Each success on the caster's Arete roll reduces the difficulty of subsequent Social-Trait rolls that are used to manipulate the target of the spell. Each success reduces the difficulty by -1, up to a maximum reduction of -3. Why are the Fallen so good at what they do? Because one of the first things they learn involves appealing to people's weaknesses.

# The Art of Seduction (•• Mind; possibly with •••• Entropy or ••• Life added)

No power the Fallen possess is greater than their ability to manipulate others into doing what they want. And although Nephandi have no qualms about using magickal compulsions when need be, they prefer to seduce and convince rather than compel, if only because it fits their overall philosophy to show how awful humans can and will be to one another given have a reason to be that way. For the most part, the Fallen rely on non-magickal people skills. When a given target needs a slight push over the edge, however, this subtle enchantment lends extra allure to a potential seduction by helping the magus spot the weak spots in his victim's psyche and then use the right tactics to draw her over to his side.

Establishing casual contact (or perhaps building upon an existing relationship), the mage begins to probe for emotional and psychological vulnerabilities. As their bond deepens, the Nephandus begins to press those points in order to lead the victim toward his desired conclusions. Although nothing he does screams "magick," the dance of subtle influence exerts a stronger pull on the victim's heart and mind. With time and patience, he may easily win her over to beliefs, opinions, and activities she would have considered utterly alien before. Although he never overtly enslaves her free will, his machinations slide her further and further away from what she would have considered "free will" up to then. Once successfully cast, this bond proves incredibly hard to break...if she even wants to try and break it at all.

System: Although its magickal element is simple — Mind 2, possibly with an added kick from Life 3 — the process of casting this enchantment requires patience and people skills. A long process of developing intimacy through conversations — a process that can range from days to months — probes the target, suggests what that target wants to hear and feel, gives the target what she thinks she wants, and then slowly shifts that person's desires and convictions in the caster's favor. In game terms, this generally involves Social Traits combined with Abilities suitable to what the Fallen One wishes to accomplish...and a smart seducer varies his tactics, if only to keep from becoming predictable.

Unlike many malefic enchantments, this spell relies mostly upon eye contact and speaking, possibly augmented with brief touches to enhance the bond between the Fallen One and his victim. Texts, phone conversations, and internet contact can work as well, although the caster's difficulty rises by +2 if he's working through such remote media.

The initial probe involves a Mind 2 "scan" of the target's psyche; the difficulty is the target's Willpower, and three successes or more will map out a fairly accurate impression of her strengths and weaknesses.

From there, this seduction involves an additional extended roll — perhaps several of them over a period of time, using different Attributes and Abilities but gathering successes toward a single goal: Bringing that victim under the Fallen One's sway. The amount of time and effort involved in this process depends a lot on how much contact the two parties have with one another, the appeal the Nephandus has for the target in question, and the distance between what she'd initially believed and what he wants to convince her to believe.

Successes	Goal
3	Seducing the victim to accept things she's already inclined to accept.
5	Overcoming slight resistance to the seduction.
10	Overcoming doubts, reservations, or disinterest.
15	Overcoming willful resistance to the caster's influence.
20+	Overcoming all resistance and doing whatever the caster suggests.

So long as the Nephandus remains successful in his efforts to win the victim's trust, this spell remains coincidental. Although the target's Willpower Trait sets the base difficulty for the casting rolls, successful Social-Trait rolls can lower that difficulty of subsequent casting rolls to a minimum of 3.

Higher-level variants on this enchantment allow the seducer to gradually destroy the victim's deeply held convictions (with Entropy 5); flood her with subtle yet influential chemical reactions (Life 3), or both. For details about the systems involved see the How Do You DO That? entries for Conceptual Entropy (pp. 134-136) and Tweaking Chemistry (p. 120).

The initial probes scope out not only the weak spots in the victim's psyche but the strong points as well. Ideally, this familiarity with her mental and emotional landscape keeps him from making stupid mistakes. If the seducer pushes the wrong button, however, (like, for example, running into a Merit or Flaw which goes against the seducer's enticements), the target gets an immediate chance to notice his manipulations and break the hold he has over her. A successful Willpower roll (difficulty is the caster's Willpower) gets her questioning the bond with a single success, doubting it with three successes, and shattering it for good with five successes or more.

Assuming the seducer doesn't make any stupid mistakes, a powerful bond might last a lifetime. In real life, without paranormal tools, a clever manipulator can burrow so deeply into a person's psyche that she'll never truly be rid of his influence even if she eventually kicks him to the curb.

This seduction doesn't have to be sexual in nature. It may involve anything the Nephandus desires: political convictions, financial decisions, religious beliefs, business ethics, social paradigms, and so forth. A successful seducer can convince a vegan to turn carnivore, get a socialist to join the jet set, have a poor person turn over her paycheck to him, entice someone into sex with people not of their preferred gender, and otherwise draw people into activities they would never have believed themselves capable of doing... things they never would have done, if this particular devil hadn't somehow convinced them that it seemed like a good idea at the time.

Make no mistake: This enchantment and its related machinations are abuse and betrayal of the lowest kind. With

them, the seducer works his way past conscious resistance, insinuates himself into his victim's trust, weaponizes her trust, and then turns that trust against her. He does this intentionally, willfully, and without remorse. Though he'll insist he has good intentions at heart, the use of this "art" proves otherwise. As subtle and friendly as it might appear, this is a cold tool in ruthless hands.

Although Nephandi couldn't care less about a victim's consent, the Storyteller should *always* keep consent in mind when employing these sorts of tactics in her game. This spell – let's be clear here – should *never* be used, *ever*, to compel a character to do something the player feels uncomfortable about doing. Although the Storyteller could suggest the growing power of the Fallen seducer's bond, your players should *never* be put into a situation where a player feels uneasy or unsafe for real.

For guidelines surrounding potentially upsetting roleplay, see "Dancing on the Knife's Edge" in Chapter Seven, pp. XX-XX. For further details regarding spells of influence and enchantment, see the "Uncanny Influence" section of **How Do You** DO **That?** particularly pp. 119-120.

### Every Man Against His Brother (••, •••, •••• or ••••• Mind; possibly with the appropriate dots in Correspondence added)

We are all, it seems, just one little push from full-out war with one another. Nephandi love to supply that push. At crucial moments—often after riling people up with a perfectly normal yet incendiary speech or activity (or an *unnatural* one like **Rile the Herd**, below)—a Fallen malcontent tosses off this spell and turns a crowd into a riot. Especially in the current era, with tensions stoked at a constant fever pitch, this stunt is maddeningly, often murderously, effective.

System: The easiest variation on this spell involves a Mind 2 emotional push, generally sent out after the Fallen One has flared tempers through non-magickal means. (Picking a fight, shoving someone from behind, maneuvering people who hate one another to begin with into an impending confrontation, and so forth.) The more successes the caster rolls, the more people the spell affects:

Successes	Size of Crowd
1	One person.
2	Up to five people.
3	Up to 20 people.
4	Over 100 people.
5+	Several hundred people.

The power behind that push depends upon the Rank of the Effect: Mind 2 gets people to do something they're inclined to do anyhow, Mind 3 overcomes their reservations, Mind 4 makes them go against their best interests and inhibitions, and Mind 5 turns them into veritable puppets on Nephandic strings.



Most Nephandi don't need more than Mind 2 or maybe 3 in order to get results.

An optional Correspondence element lets the Fallen One set off the chaos from a distance. As always, the dots in Correspondence must equal the dots in Mind when someone casts this spell. For more details, see "Influence at a Distance" in How Do You DO That? p. 116.

Except in the most obvious, clumsy forms—like, for example, bathing in blood and then chanting out demonic incantations just before the spell kicks in — this Effect remains coincidental. The difficulty of the casting roll depends on the targets' collective Willpower... which, in the case of a bunch of average folks who're already pissed off about something, is probably around 3. Non-violent people, strong-willed people, or people who have a lot to lose and nothing to gain from a fight will be harder to convince, of course (say, difficulty 5 or higher). However, as shown by the bloody violence inflicted by Buddhist monks upon Muslims, Jains or Hindus, everybody's got their breaking point.

### Look Away (•• Forces, or •• Mind, or ••• Mind and •• Matter, or •• - ••• Life; possibly with •• Forces added)

As masters of misdirection and subversion, the Fallen employ a simple yet effective trick: getting people to look

where you are not. At this spell's basic levels, the caster waves a distracting sound or impulse to attract attention away from her presence. An easy variant of this Effect projects a psychic "deflection shield" that causes perceptions to slide off around the area or person the caster wishes to conceal. At higher levels, the Nephandus can silently command witnesses to look elsewhere while she makes her escape. Although this spell cannot conceal vulgar acts of magick (in other words, it won't turn vulgar magick with witnesses into vulgar magick without witnesses), it's an excellent tool for turning attention away from a Fallen mage who'd rather not be seen or sensed otherwise.

**System:** The simplest application of this spell uses Forces 2 to flare a source of light, shift colors, push a small object over from a distance, or draw subtle shadows into the caster's vicinity. Although this spell won't generate forces that don't already exist, it lets the mage create a distraction by manipulating forces that are already present.

A similarly simple variation employs a Mind 2 "mood impulse" to distract a would-be witness for a moment while the Nephandus makes her move.

A more complicated version sets a "don't look here" impulse into a moving object or person. In this case, the caster needs Mind 3, plus either Matter 2 or Life 2 (for the caster) or 3 (for someone else) in order to "lock" the Effect in place, as described in Mage 20, p. 511-512. For the duration of the spell, that impulse sends out a potent psychic push which keeps witnesses from looking at the mage unless they consciously overcome that Effect. (See "Influence-Magic Difficulties" in How Do You DO That? p. 116.)

In all cases, the protected character has a chance to make a Dexterity + Stealth or Wits + Subterfuge roll (whichever Trait is higher) in order to remain undetected. The difficulty of that roll depends on the circumstances:

Difficulty	Circumstances
5	Good cover or plenty of distractions.
6	${\sf Decent coveror moderately busy surrounding s.}$
7	Little cover or quiet surroundings.
8	Very little cover or no distractions.
9	Out in the open in plain sight.

Each success deducts a success from someone who's looking for that character. If no one's deliberately looking for the character, then she slips away or remains unobtrusive and unnoticed unless she does something to make herself obvious.

The advanced "traveling" version of the spell gives the Nephandus one temporary dot in Arcane or Cloaking (as in that Background Trait) for the duration of the spell. If she already has Arcane, then it adds one temporary dot, up to a maximum of 10 dots. This temporary version of Arcane does not alter records or (unless Forces 2 is added) blur images or distort other electrical recordings, but it'll make people's minds essentially "slide off" the mage's presence.

This trick does not supply true silence, invisibility, or the ability to disappear into darkness. For those tricks, see **How Do You** DO **That?** p. 34.

# Rile the Herd (•• Correspondence or •• Entropy or •• Mind; a stronger variant uses ••• in each Sphere instead)

The mass-media era has been a gift to the Nephandi. Thanks to TV, the internet, and so on, spells that could once reach a mere handful of people can incite chaos and social unrest. Using the platform of a mass-media creation — a game, a concert, a news broadcast, and so forth — a Nephandus can sway a large (potentially huge) audience toward thoughts and deeds that might otherwise seem forbidden to express: group sex, mob violence, pervasive distrust, a lingering but pervasive attraction to psychoactive drugs or the occult... just the sort of things preachers warned us about during various moral panics. Of course, the message <code>itself</code> might be a moral panic instead, setting the masses against perfectly innocent artists, entertainers, and fans. Unlike Every Man Against His Brother, above, this spell has many applications that aren't immediately violent or obvious.

System: This ritual essentially duplicates the Media Bomb Demonic Investment, but in an Awakened and possibly more-potent fashion. Mind 2 ignites an emotional urge, Correspondence 2 conveys the spell across distances via media, and Entropy 2 nudges probabilities toward chaos. The Effect lasts for the usual Duration time, but six successes or more can implant that Effect into the work of media permanently, crafting the archetypal "song that incites riots" or "book which drives men mad." The Effect is most potent the first time the audience beholds it, but subsequent viewings might have similar, if lessened, results after repeated viewings.

Although the caster determines the sort of influence she wants to extend through her work, the Storyteller determines the ultimate results on her audience. Those results, regardless of success, will be gradual and subtle. The Rank 2 version of this spell remains coincidental — the audience is simply reacting in ways one might expect people to react. A character who wants to avoid the emotional surge can try to resist it with his Willpower (as per the usual rules), but that won't save him from the effects of that spell on everyone nearby.

A more potentiversion would use the third Rank of Spheres instead. This version is *vulgar with witnesses*, and its effects are both drastic and immediate. In this case, the audience's response seems a bit too extreme to be entirely natural. Still, this level of chaos has its purposes. When your ideals include the collapse of civilization, every little bit helps.

### Beautify or Deform (\*\*\* or \*\*\*\* Life)

People place great stock in the value of physical beauty. And so, with a few not-entirely simple adjustments, a Fallen One can transform a person into either a gorgeous paragon or a horrifying monster. If she wishes to do so, she can also use this trick to change a person's skin color, physique, apparent gender, or physical sex. Depending on the Nephandus and her methods, this transformation process could involve cosmetic treatments, demonic invocations, training regimens, blessings or curses, or perhaps a few well-spoken words powerful enough to literally change a person's life.

A slightly different but related variant, **Inhuman Endurance**, allows the mage or her target to sustain pain and injury far beyond normal human limits. By boosting the subject's stamina, possibly also repairing minor damage, the Fallen One facilitates greater potential for rough play and survivable torments.

Fallen mages who employ this enchantment often use it on themselves, their associates, and quite often on people they're trying to seduce. This is why so many Nephandi are either gorgeous or horrific. A Nephandus who beautifies someone else will near-inevitably use that beauty as a ransom to assure their cooperation. Refuse to follow directions? Well, what goes up must inevitably come back down — hard.

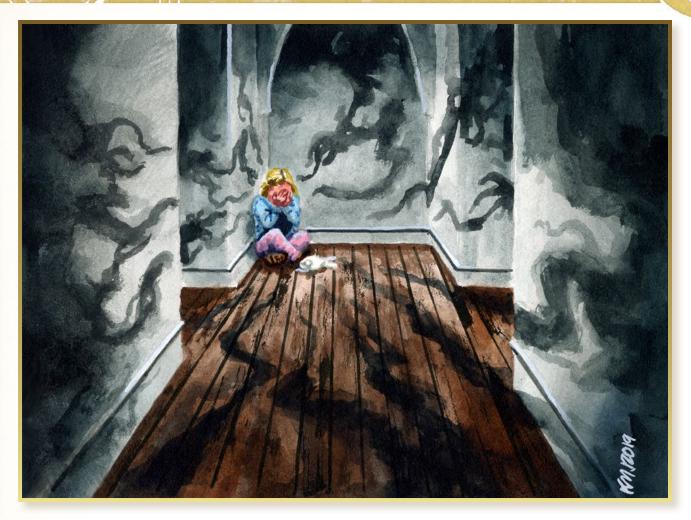
**System:** Mechanically, this process is simple: Life 3 transforms the mage herself, while Life 4 transforms somebody else. In this case, the transformation either makes that person more physically attractive than they were before, or else turns their looks to utter shit.

Normally, this transformation lasts for the Effect's usual Duration. In order to make the change permanent, the caster needs at least four successes to enact a permanent cosmetic change on herself, and at least six successes to enact such changes on another character.

Because different people consider different features "attractive," the Beautify variation alters the Attributes of the caster's choice — typically Appearance, possibly Charisma, or very possibly (especially when a dude is the subject of this spell) Strength. Each Attribute dot raised by this spell requires one success. If the player wishes to keep the new Attribute permanently, she must spend the usual amount of experience points in order to raise that Attribute to its new level. If the character on the receiving end of this spell receives more than five dots in Appearance, then he also receives the Merit: Enchanting Feature for the Duration of the spell. If the Effect is permanent, then the player must pay the appropriate amount of experience points in order to buy that Merit.

If the transformation *removes* Attributes instead, each dot removed requires an additional success on the casting roll. If he's rendered seriously ugly, the character receives (and gets the points from) the Flaws: *Repulsive Feature* (for transformations which drop Appearance to 1) or *Monstrous* (which drop it to 0).

In all cases, the Storyteller should describe how the improved or ruined looks appear and affect the story. Boosting a Trait by a dot or three isn't nearly as interesting as detailing the character's straight new teeth, wavy new hair, or newly misshapen skull.



The Inhuman Endurance variant raises the subject's Stamina Attribute as described above. This spell has no cosmetic effects, but it allows that character to withstand incredible amounts of pain. By adding additional successes (via the "Optional Dividing Successes Rule," Mage 20, p. 504 and p. 538), she can also heal damage to that character's body. In this case, each additional success heals two health levels of any sort of damage.

Subtle transformations which can be explained with makeup, posture, prosthesis, and so forth remain coincidental. Radical transformations, in either direction, are generally vulgar magick unless they involve methods which fit into the local reality paradigm. For details about extensive magickal alterations, check out "Conjuration, Transformation, Shapechanging, and Modification" in **How Do You** DO **That?** pp. 18-25.

# Blindside (••• Correspondence, plus •• ••• Matter, •• - ••• Forces, or •• Prime, or a combination of the three)

Nephandi excel at instilling paranoia, striking from surprise, and keeping their prey off balance in every possible way. This trick, then, allows a Fallen mage to alter surfaces, generate shocks, bend light and sound in unsettling ways, spawn frightening noises, weaken structures, and reach through temporary gateways in order to swipe objects, switch things around, smack the victim from behind, and otherwise mess with her sense of reality in a world where, it appears, the environment itself is a trap. Best of all, these unsettling quirks of localized hostility appear — in most cases — to be perfectly normal...which can lead the victim to assume she's having a mental break even when her reactions to these blindside attacks are perfectly sane.

**System:** Correspondence 3 allows the assailant to alter the victim's surroundings from a distance. So long as he has a way to reach his target (see the *Correspondence Sphere Ranges chart*, **Mage 20**, p. 504), the Fallen One can perpetrate a number of insidious pranks:

- Matter 2 can alter the texture or angle of a surface, making it slippery, tacky, sharp, rough, and so forth.
- Matter 3 can transform a surface or structure in alarming ways, shifting marble to glass, steel to rubber, brick to mud, etc.
- Forces 2 alters existing localized forces like electricity, light, sound, and the like, allowing the mage to

dampen or intensify them, send sudden shocks, alter temperatures, surge or cut electrical power, fry electrical devices, and that sort of thing.

- Forces 3 or Prime 2 lets the Nephandus generate new forces from "nowhere," creating light where there was darkness (and vice versa), generating sounds and other illusions, assaulting the victim with elemental strikes, and otherwise making her life miserable.
- Finally, with Correspondence 3 alone, he can reach into her space and then either quickly withdraw before he's been seen or perhaps ambush her from a place he had not been a moment before.

These assaults remain coincidental so long as there's not something obviously strange going on. A power surge or mysterious noise seems to be perfectly normal, while a hand reaching from thin air or a soft carpet suddenly changing into hot magma does not.

If the assault inflicts damage, then that damage depends upon what's going on. A fall down a suddenly slick staircase deals out bashing damage based upon the successes rolled; a hand cut by a razor-sharp bannister involves pain but not a life-threatening degree of injury; creepy sounds in the middle of the night inflicts no damage at all, but a shock from a power surge could provide excruciating and perhaps fatal injury. For the damage related to various phenomena, see the "Environmental Hazards" section in Mage 20, pp. 435-441.

The real threat from this assault, however, is more psychological than physical. As a rule, a Fallen assailant prefers to terrorize his victim with unpredictable and unexplainable dangers, not kill her with overwhelming force. Although this spell could be used to maim or kill the target (inflicting success-based damage as if the Blindside was a normal combat attack), it's more insidious – and more fun – to use it as a tool for gaslighting (as detailed in Chapter Two) and paranoia. Thanks to this trick, the Nephandus can rearrange furniture, move things around, take or leave objects, frighten his prey with ominous sensations, and generally mess with her world. The effects of this cat-and-mouse game are left to the Storyteller's imagination...but when the stuff we take for granted starts changing without apparent cause, it does tend to mess with our heads no matter who we are or how safe we think we might be.

# Blur Truth or Fake News (••• Mind; possibly with ••• or •••• Correspondence and ••••• Entropy added)

The dizzying mental gymnastics involved in the "fake news" phenomenon often seem like magic. When the Fallen are involved in such things, they literally *are* magick. Thanks to a mental push that reinforces the audience's preconceptions about a given subject, an effective form of Nephandic magick (possibly adopted and refined from techniques employed by the NWO) reworks the reality of the people who receive its

message. Thus, patently absurd things become gospel truth while all sources contradicting that truth become "fake" as far as the audience is concerned.

This enchantment works two different yet related ways:

- Cast onto an individual person, it convinces that person that only the information coming from a certain source is true. As far as he's concerned, all other sources of information are false.
- Worked into a media venue (web post, video, TV broadcast, etc.), it convinces a percentage of the audience that only the information provided in that venue is correct. Again, all other sources are false.

A relatively simple variation of this enchantment influences the mental process of the audience in question; a more complex version breaks down the audience's previous beliefs and restructures them to accept the source of Nephandic "truth." Both versions can be cast on individuals or, with the addition of the Correspondence Sphere, on a distant and perhaps vast audience. A combination of Correspondence 5, Entropy 5, and Mind 3 is hard to cast but damned near unbeatable in terms of influence.

Like many influence spells, this enchantment comes wrapped in arguments, phrases, ideas, and images that appeal to the victim's beliefs. If those arguments oppose the victim's beliefs too radically, however, she's not likely to accept the "truth" that's being served up to her. That's okay, though — plenty of other people will be.

**System:** The core of this spell is simple: Mind 3 influences the thoughts of people on the receiving end of the Effect, weaving in a subtle illusion that the information is true no matter how absurd it actually is.

Correspondence allows the caster to affect people – possibly a *lot* of people – at a distance. As always, the Rank of Correspondence must equal the Rank of the other Spheres involved in the spell: Mind 3 requires Correspondence 3, while Entropy 5 demands Correspondence 5.

The ultimate version of this enchantment uses **Conceptual Entropy** to break down ideas which oppose the Nephandic message, leaving the mental door wide open for the acceptance of whatever concepts the Fallen One wants to introduce.

If the ideas presented by the Fallen mage come across like things the targets of this spell want to believe anyway, those folks don't need convincing. The Storyteller can assume the spell is automatically successful on non-player characters.

If those ideas seem a bit far-fetched, the casting roll must score at least three successes. The difficulty for that roll is the Willpower Trait for the recipient(s) of the message. Assume a difficulty of 3 for the average person, higher than that for people with strong convictions.

The larger the audience, the larger the number of successes necessary; see the Magickal Feats chart in Mage 20 (p. 502) for potential target numbers.

Large-scale castings involve instruments like Internet Activity, Mass Media, significant Symbols, and Writings and Inscriptions, although rallies, prosperity seminars, team-building exercises, and other Group Rites can pass this spell along to great numbers of people as well. The core of this enchantment involves forging a group identity among a bunch of people, and then rallying that group's identity around the ideas presented in the spell.

The metaphysical element of this influence lasts for the normal Duration of the spell. After that, the conviction might fade in intensity yet retain a certain foothold within the audience's beliefs simply because it seems to make sense even when there's no longer magick behind that impression.

Breaking free of this enchantment's influence demands a Willpower roll (difficulty 8); most folks, though, don't even want to break free. The power of this idea comes not from the magick involved but from the willingness of its audience to believe.

For further details about "Influence at a Distance," "Resistance, Recognition, and Duration," "Illusions," and Conceptual Entropy, see the entries of those names in How Do You DO That? pp. 115-117, pp. 129-131, and pp. 134-136.

### Constant Cravings (••• Life and ••• Mind: can also be ••• Mind)

Hunger. For food. Touch. Fulfillment. Drugs. Sex. Anything, really. Strong hungers drive people to desperate acts. So, naturally, the Fallen have spells that can induce cravings of such extremity that a person will do irrational, savage, self-destructive things in order to fulfill them. Nothing can satisfy such cravings, though. Until the spell runs its course (assuming it ever does) or the Nephandus releases her prey from his hungers, the afflicted party will do whatever it takes to feed a hunger that never seems to end.

**System:** Although Life 3 binds this enchantment into the body of the affected character, the damage it inflicts, and the psychological component of the craving, comes from Mind 3. The caster decides what her victim will crave, and then implants that urge.

This spell's Duration follows the usual success-based length given on the *Base Damage or Duration chart*; three successes, for example, will make the cravings last one day, while five successes would make them last six months. Throughout the spell's Duration, the victim will suffer increasingly painful cravings — pain that might escalate to bashing damage if the victim does nothing to satisfy the urge.

To make those cravings more painful, the caster may employ the "Optional Dividing Successes Rule" (Mage 20, p. 504 and p. 538). Each additional success added inflicts two health levels of bashing damage. Each minute the victim refuses to satisfy the cravings, he suffers a health level of damage, for as long as the additional successes provide damage. (An additional four successes, for example, will inflict eight health levels of bashing damage, at a rate of one health level per turn for eight

minutes.) If and when he gives in and tries to sate his hunger, the pain stops...until he refuses the urge again, at which point it continues. Given a substantial number of successes, this spell could last for a very long, and very painful, time.

Even without the added damage, this spell has vicious effects. So long as the enchantment lasts, the victim endures an obsessive, nerve-grinding *need*. That craving passes for a short time while he indulges it but so long as the magick lingers, the compulsion never goes away.

Fallen lust merchants typically turn this spell into a ritual involving prolonged contact, conversation, sex, feasting, and so forth. While the victim remains distracted, the Nephandus works her Arts on him. Thus, the spell is coincidental (and employs the usual rules for Mind-based influence Effects) so long as the caster isn't openly commanding her prey to crave something to the point of madness.

# Grasping Terrors (••• Matter; possibly with •• Prime or ••• Spirit added)

Hands! From nowhere! Grapping, clutching, grasping, tearing! Perhaps they're formed of shadow, or erupt suddenly from stone walls or concrete sidewalks, or jut forth from pools of goo or water. Maybe they're human-like limbs, tentacular pseudopods, or claws from some unholy beast. Whatever their source, and whatever form they assume, these grasping terrors reach out and grab the Fallen mage's victim, often by surprise, and never rooted in a normal living thing. Although they might scratch, claw, and hold him fast, the most effective element of this uncanny assault comes from its sheer weirdness and jump-shock terror.

**System:** This simple Matter 3 attack manifests as an eruption of limbs bursting from a surface of the mage's choice. The attack inflicts success-based bashing damage, as usual, and holds the victim in a Grapple attack (**Mage 20**, p. 421) worth one dot of Strength for every success rolled on the casting roll.

Potential variations include:

- Prime 2, which lets the attacks inflict aggravated damage.
- Spirit 3, which channels the assault through Umbral assailants who exist and attack in the Otherworlds as well, and who can harm and hold Umbral denizens as easily as they can affect mortal folk in the material world.
- Both Spirit 3 and Prime 2 combined inflict aggravated damage attacks upon whomever they touch.

This attack, obviously, is vulgar as hell, and it lasts for the usual success-based Duration of the spell.

# I Disappear (••• Correspondence and• Forces; possibly with •• Mind added)

The Fallen are known for their affinity with darkness. Given a shadowy corner, a modestly skillful Nephandus can appear from nowhere, slip into that darkness and vanish, or shift from shadow to shadow without crossing the distance in between them. This sort of thing can be rather unnerving to folks who witness it, and it slides a bit of ice up the spine of nearby people even if they don't see the Fallen One in action at the time.

**System:** Forces 2 gathers darkness and banishes light, Correspondence 3 teleports the mage to a new location, and an optional Mind 2 Effect gives witnesses an extra eerie chill.

### Mirror, Mirror or Murphy's Mirror (••• Mind; possibly with •• Forces added)

Mirrors are unreliable things, more accurately reflecting what we think we see than the physical form refracted by light in the surface of that mirror. And so, this subtle yet terrible spell shows the viewer one of two options: What they wish to see about themselves, accentuating all their best features (Mirror, Mirror), or what they hate and fear about themselves, accentuating all their worst features (Murphy's Mirror). Both variations have drastic effects on the viewer's self-confidence — either building it up to the point of delusional vanity, or else tearing it down to the point of loathing. With this enchantment, a Nephandus messes with her target's mind, breeding egotism or despair.

**System:** Mind 3 allows the caster to access the target's mental self-image and then intensify it either for the better or for the worse. For **Murphy's Mirror**, the spell also dredges up those things people don't like to think about themselves but *do* think about anyway. In both cases, the basic spell shows that reflection only to the person who's looking at himself in the mirror. With an additional Forces 2 component, though, the caster can subtly bend light so that other people looking in the mirror can see that mental projection too. In both cases, this spell follows the usual rules for Mind-Sphere-based Effects.

Because the image is rooted in what the viewer subconsciously expects to see, this spell remains coincidental if the subject is the only one who sees it. A deeply distorted reflection that's radically different from the person standing in front of them, however, becomes vulgar if other people can see it too.

### Plague Mass (••• Correspondence, ••• Life, and ••• Spirit; possibly with •• or ••• Mind added)

Sickness, as the ancients understood, is not merely a matter of chemical reactions and viral biology. A true plague is a weapon in the hands of gods, demons, and their mortal servitors. Ancient Mesopotamia viewed demons as bearers of disease, and the Bible recounts the many plagues decreed by the Lord as tests and punishment. Greek and Mesoamerican deities bestowed pestilence upon the errant and the innocent alike. A plague, then, is spiritual justice which breaks down the body and erodes the mind.

This primal spell, old even in the days when Egypt was young, uncorks a miasma of metaphysical disease. Not merely physical illnesses, such Nephandic plagues attack every element of their victims, often spreading with unnatural rapidity. The form and severity of the plague itself may vary: some spells unleash painful boils, uncontrollable shitting, crippling pain or leprous rot; others erode the sanity of their victims, kill nearly instantly, disfigure those unfortunate enough to contract them, or maybe several or even all of those awful yet mythically traditional symptoms of uncleanliness.

Ancient as it is, this **Plague Mass** occupies a place of honor among the Exie sect. Given the constant traffic of our global age, the right pandemic at the right time could be just the ticket to our ultimate extinction.

System: Thanks to its traditional approach, this ritual weaves a Life-based illness from malign spirit-entities rather than the usual Prime 2 supply of energy. A purely *physical* illness would demand Prime 2 (in order to create the tiny bio-organisms) and some extensive knowledge of virology. The Eaters of the Weak, however, have been at their job much longer than mere medical practitioners, and so although this spiritual sickness *can* be healed magickally, it doesn't obey the usual laws of modern medicine.

Rules-wise, that Life Effect manifests as the illness of the mage's choosing. If it subtracts health levels from its victims, then that damage follows the usual rules for Life-Sphere aggravated damage. The mage can choose to let it creep in over time rather than strike the victims all at once, and the form the damage takes (boils, pain, warped bones, heavy bleeding, and so forth) is entirely at the mage's discretion.

Alternately, the Storyteller can use the rules for drugs, poisons, and disease given in Mage 20, pp. 441-442. In this case, each success scored by the caster inflicts one level of severity on the Toxins chart, although the effects of a severe illness can set in much faster if the Storyteller desires.

Meanwhile, the Correspondence Sphere spreads the disease, plants it somewhere far away from the caster, or both. An optional Mind 2 or 3 element drives the afflicted people to despair, fury, or potentially lasting madness.

Due to the complex nature of the spell, and the potentially vast area it affects, the Storyteller should feel free to use the Magickal Feats chart (Mage 20, p. 502) to determine the severity and duration of the plague. Keeping track of every single element involved in such a feat would be complicated as hell. For simplicity's sake, consider that plague to be a story element unless a player character catches it. In the latter case, see the Life Sphere or Toxins chart options referred to above. Because the disease is innately unnatural, it doesn't need to behave according to modern medical ideas about disease, and the Storyteller may bestow whichever awful afflictions seem most appropriate to the story and to the Fallen One who invokes such a plague.

### Kraft Memetic Catastrophe (••• Mind, ••• Spirit, and •• Prime; possibly with ••• Correspondence and Data or •• Entropy added)

Symbols and hypersigils dominate the media age. Clever use of such creations can shape reality for dozens, hundreds, perhaps millions of potential believers. A sufficiently engaging symbol or sigil, such as Baphomet or Basilisk, can wrap itself around the imaginations of its audience, drawing psychic energy from them and feeding upon it. With enough energy, that symbol may achieve a sort of astral life — even, with significant amounts of energy behind it—sentience. Although few people would think of such entities as "demons," that is exactly, in an Aristotlean sense, what it is: a *daimon* spirit "replete with knowledge" and possessing life and identity of its own.

More often than not, these egregores manifest spontaneously, drawing their essence from the collective human imagination. Certain mages, however — most notably Nephandic reality hackers like the HOBs and Goatkids, many of whom once belonged to the Virtual Adepts, Cult of Ecstasy, Syndicate or NWO — understand that such beings can be intentionally created by folks who understand the principles behind them and possess the power to bring those elements together. Although a memetic entity soon dissipates back unless it catches hold of the popular imagination, entities who *do* achieve lasting sentience can become quite powerful indeed.

To spawn a hypersigil entity, the would-be creator must work up a symbol or character that resonates with the popular imagination at that time and place. Cartoon or video characters, meme images, phrases or acronyms, iconic logos or symbols... anything that could grab a lot of attention and then focus that attention toward the existence of that hypersigil is fair game. Traditionally, this sort of thing has required a skilled artist; in the internet era, though, when cat videos and stick figures capture the mass imagination, that's not necessarily the case anymore. Still, a creator who's *intentionally* creating a sigil with mass appeal ought to know her way around the artistic design process; without such expertise, the sigil's liable to get lost in the massive flood of media impressions — barely remembered if noticed at all.

System: The Sphere Effects involved in this process are pretty straightforward: Mind 3 influences people to pay attention to the sigil and focus their psychic energy toward its existence, Prime 2 gathers and invests Quintessential energy into the sigil, and Spirit 3 allows the caster to shape spiritual essence into what might (with luck) become an Umbral entity in its own right.

The tricky parts of this ritual involve the design of the hypersigil, the propagation of that sigil into popular attention, the growth of an entity from that attention, and the caster's control (or lack of it) over that entity once it spawns.

From a rules standpoint, the first step involves five or more successes on a roll of Perception + Art or Expression (whichever

is higher), difficulty 8. After all, designing something is relatively easy if you know how, but designing something which resonates with a mass audience is an entirely different matter.

As the sigil is being created, the caster invests it with an Effect of Mind 3, Spirit 3, and Prime 2. This Effect sets the energies and intentions behind that sigil into action. This casting is usually coincidental because, unless the Nephandus conducts a Black Mass or something while blasting blood-red energy into her design, no one can actually see the psychic energy infusing the sigil.

Propagating the symbol involves circulating it through mass media. These days, that's not hard at all — but again, given the signal-to-noise ratio in today's media, that's more of a matter of good luck than of creative skill. By adding Entropy 2 to this enchantment, a mage could influence the probability that this particular hypersigil will catch fire in the popular imagination. Rules-wise, this propagation involves a roll of Perception + Art, Expression, or Media, whichever seems most appropriate to the method chosen by the caster.

A related Correspondence or Data Effect can propagate the sigil on a massive scale. This part of the spell usually involves computers, videos or other media used as focus instruments, although some impressions can be circulated by spray-painting them in strategic places.

Whether or not the sigil captures mass attention, and subsequently begins to gather enough psychic energy to attain egregore status, is a Storyteller call. If the caster manages to score 10 successes or more with the propagation roll, however, it's a good bet the sigil will become a touchstone of popular culture...and maybe even achieve an independent existence as an egregore.

From that point, the mage deals with the egregore as if it was a minor spirit of any other kind. Although the creator of the egregore might believe she's got the inside track with regards to that entity — perhaps even believe that, as its creator, she owns the things she has brought into being — egregores are self-willed entities, formed from a rather rebellious sort of collective belief and truly owned by no one except themselves.

For more about egregores, see Mage 20, p. 574 and pp. 598-599. For several sample memetic entities, see the entry of that name in Chapter Six.

### Shadow of the Black Wind (••• - •••• Forces, ••• Spirit, •• Mind, and •• Prime)

Darkness is a Fallen One's best friend. And if that darkness includes a cold whirl of tortured souls, so much the better. This eldritch enchantment calls up a cold and frightening wind, laced with howling spirits and bringing with it a pervasive chill and all-concealing darkness.

**System:** Rules-wise, this one's pretty straightforward: Forces and Prime invoke the wind and banish light from within

the area, Spirit calls up a host of minor spirits to inhabit it, and Mind adds a terrifying emotional surge to the presence of that wind. If the Fallen One chooses to inflict damage with the wind, that damage is applied according to the successes rolled with a normal Forces attack.

The level of Forces involved depends upon the area affected by the storm. A strong, short-lived wind affecting a small area is Forces 3, a larger, more powerful storm is Forces 4, and a huge black tempest is Forces 5.

For details about conjured storms, cold, and darkness, see How Do You DO That? pp. 34-35 (Shadowplay and Temperature Fluctuations) and p. 40 (Summoning Storms).

# Timeless Agony (••• Life, ••• Mind, and ••• - •••• Time; possibly just ••• Life and ••• - •••• Time)

Fear not the one who can destroy your body. Fear the one who can tear every element of who you are to pieces without harming the biological structure that houses your soul. Crafted in the early days of Bhât and refined throughout the subsequent millennia in torture chambers from Bejing to Abu Garib, this infernal ritual drops the victim into a timeless space where anguish becomes the only reality he knows. Rumors claim this rite provided the basis for the Ecstatic punishment called the "Red Wheel;" the truth might be the other way around. Whatever the origins of this sordid Art might be, it's among the most fearsome weapons in a Nephandic arsenal. For while the human body has limited endurance, this rite's only limits are the torturer's imagination and the nonexistent mercy of the person using it.

System: The rite begins with a properly secured victim — and the more helpless he feels, the better. Although the tormentor can show various implements of horror to the victim (and can use them if she wishes to), the nature of this rite transcends physical disfigurement. Essentially, it locks that victims mind and body in a loop of constant pain. Life keeps the body alive and motionless while inflicting pain and healing all physical harm; Mind provides the worst agonies, thanks to a combination of psychic assault and a pervasive emotional tide of helpless horror. Time removes the victim's perception of time (Time 3) or removes him entirely from the passage of Consensus time (Time 4). For as long as the caster maintains the Effect, that victim remains trapped in a cycle of relentless, cell-deep torment.

Rules-wise, this Effect inflicts the pain of aggravated damage (based, as usual, upon the number of successes rolled) without destroying the body in the process. Unlike most forms of physical torture, the victim cannot escape through unconsciousness or death. The spell keeps him alive and cognizant throughout the "procedure" and thanks to the Mind component of the rite, he may imagine any form of mind-warping sadistic mutilation the Fallen One wishes to inflict. Rats inside you? Slow-motion vivisection? A perpetual-motion

drawing and quartering in which the body never dies? The Nephandus doesn't need to physically commit any of those atrocities, but her victim will feel every one of them for as long as she desires him to feel them.

An even nastier variant of this ritual requires only Life 4 and Time 3 or 4. With it, the torturer can physically mutilate the victim as much as she wants, and can do so without killing him or even leaving a mark on his body. Essentially, she "transforms" his body into whatever sick configurations she desires, then transforms him back.

If the Nephandus chooses to inflict psychic damage only, the victim can resist its effects with successful applications of Willpower. (See "Influence-Magick Difficulties" and "Resistance, Recognition, and Duration" in How Do You DO That? pp. 116-117.) Most Fallen, though, are not that merciful, and so although the victim can try and endure the pain (see "Resistance," Mage 20, p. 403), the entire point of this ritual involves wearing him down through time, hopelessness, and all-encompassing excruciation. Folks who manage to survive this ritual are never quite the same again; the Nightmares and PTSD Flaws reflect the aftermath of such torture, and so a survivor gets both Flaws. Unless the victim's player spends a Willpower point or two, that character also suffers the effects of Things Man Was Not Meant to Know. No one, no matter how tough they might be, walks away from this ritual mentally unscarred.

Although certain vindictive Ecstatics use a variation on this ritual as punishment (as depicted in the **Book of Secrets** Prelude), this spell is malignant to the core. Characters who perform it are choosing to commit one of the evilest activities imaginable, and should be treated accordingly.

# Untangle Tongues or Lo, It Is Written or Jabberhash (••• Mind, •• Entropy; possibly with •• Forces or •• Time added)

Language: The greatest human accomplishment, and our finest act of magick. Language has made all other human achievements possible, and so the ability to understand language in its many forms is of paramount importance if one wants to change the world.

Or to wreck it.

This spell, which features several variations, allows a Nephandus to translate, to some degree of competency, languages he does not normally understand. **Untangle Tongues** helps him decipher spoken languages, while **Lo**, **It Is Written** helps him puzzle through written communications.

Note the word "helps."

Language is funny. Its meaning depends so heavily upon context, subtext, culture, regionalisms, and similar elements that no person or spell can truly detangle every element involved in shifting from one language to another. Even book-learned "fluency" has limited value if you don't already

belong to the culture in question. That's not even bringing up matters like sarcasm, slang, satire, poetic turns of phrase, and other linguistical quirks that shift the *intended* meaning of what's said away from the *literal* meaning of what's said. Language does not translate on a one-to-one basis, and so even the most accomplished linguist or sophisticated spell merely scratches the surface of what's actually being said.

Nephandi being Nephandi, a third variation on this spell exists: **Jabberhash**. The first two applications sort languages out; this one screws them up. Itself a play on words, the name invokes a nonsense mishmash of the expression "to make hash of" (that is, to wreck), the words *jabber* and *gibberish*, and a shout-out to or mockery of Jabir ibn Hayyan, the legendary alchemist (reputedly from those ancient enemies, the Ahl-i-Batin) whose elaborate cyphers may have inspired those two words in the first place. This spell bends the same principles that translate a language, employing them to distort its meaning instead.

**System:** As with many of these enchantments, this spell features various options:

- Avery basic Mind 3 application helps a character gather a rough approximation of the speaker's or author's intended meaning. The spell remains coincidental unless the mage makes a big show of casting it, and the more successes that caster rolls, the more accurate the translation will be. As mentioned above, "accurate" is relative.
- Adding Entropy 2 adjusts the probability in favor of (or against) a more accurate translation.
- Adding Forces 2 helps the translator speak and hear the mental translation aloud.
- Adding Time 2 helps the translator "look back" through time in order to achieve a more historically (and perhaps culturally) accurate understanding of things which have been said or written.

Although this spell is usually coincidental, its difficulty climbs in relation to the obscurity of the language involved:

Difficulty	Subject's Language is
5	Straightforward, in a common* language (French, Arabic, Bengali, Cantonese, etc.).
6	Straightforward in an uncommon language (Latin, Korean, Old English, Brazilian Portuguese); or obscured, poetic or otherwise coded but in a relatively common language (Scots, Louisiana Creole French, African-American Vernacular English).
7	Straightforward in a rare language (Shoshone, Gaelic); or poetic in an uncommon one (Yiddish, Techspeak).

8	Obscure, coded, and intentionally obtuse; or
	an extremely rare language (Orok, Buryat,
	Classical Sumerian).

9 Lost language, very obscure code, or intentionally misleading ciphers.

\* "Common," of course, is relative. Swahili is common in East Africa but uncommon in Western Europe. Jabberhash, in comparison, is easy to cast. Because the intention involves scrambling the translation, the difficulty is 5, and the numbers of successes simply reflects how mangled the translation will be.

If the Nephandus casts Jabberhash to mislead a player character, the player should be told something completely, often dangerously, inaccurate and should have no idea that the spells was cast. She should take the translation at face value, which can be very dangerous indeed, especially when you're dealing with Nephhandi.

Other Traits like Cryptography, Cultural Savvy, History, Theology, and so forth can help reduce the difficulty of a related translation... or, for **Jabberhash**, to it even more misleading.

For more details about cyphers and codes, see the entry "Cryptoanalysis and Codes" in **The Book of Secrets** (pp. 120-121).

# Conjure the Beast (•••• Correspondence, ••• - •••• Spirit, often with •• Mind added)

From fell dimensions and hellish Realms, they come: infernal monsters drawn by the call of Goetic magicians and perverse witchcraft. Of all the Black Arts, the evocation of demonic forces is the most infamous, and although such rituals take many different forms, and conjure a wide variety of fiends, their primary aim involves bringing literal hell to earth. And in that regard, it's horribly successful.

Story-wise, the Fallen One creates a ritual space which suits her focus – a dimensional doorway, perhaps, or an eldritch circle, a Goetic diagram, a daemonic pentacle, or some other space wherein the caster breaks down the barriers between Consensus Reality and the Otherworlds. After making the appropriate pacts and bargains, the Nephandus opens the gate and lets the creature through... hopefully without losing control of the literally damned thing. If she's made arrangements beforehand, the gateway might conjure the beast and set it loose with a word or two; the more powerful the beast, however, the riskier the spell becomes and the more elaborate the arrangements must be.

**System:** Detailed rules for a variety of conjurations can be found in the "Summoning, Binding, Bargaining, and Warding" section of **How Do You** DO **That?** pp. 90-106. It's not an easy process, and its complexity increases with the power of the conjured beast.

Assuming a Nephandus has already brought the creature through into earthly reality, however, a "simple" Correspondence 4 Effect will open a gateway between the

caster's home and her current whereabouts. With similar arrangements, Spirit 3 or 4 (depending on the power of the conjured entity) will open a gate through to the Otherworlds and bring a creature through.

In both cases, Mind 2 generally gets added to the basic spell, so as to keep the conjured beast on the summoner's side...for the moment, at least.

Such rituals are near-inevitably vulgar, and they demand a significant number of successes before the entity comes through. That number of successes depends on the power and nature of the summoned beast:

- A material creature gated in from somewhere else in the physical world demands between two and 20 successes.
- A minor spirit called forth in its home territory (like a fire elemental in a blazing inferno) demands only enough successes to open up the Gauntlet and let the creature through.
- A major Otherworldly entity must be brought forth from its home Realm, an operation which demands 15 successes or more.

Thanks to the numbers of successes necessary, this Effect generally demands extended successes generated by a ritual, as detailed in Mage 20, Chapter Ten.

Once the conjured creature has done whatever needed to be done, or if it gets out of control and needs to be sent away, a successful repeat of the initial spell should send the beats away. What it does after that is the sort of thing legends speak of...but it probably won't be good.

# Abyssal Escape (••••• Correspondence, ••••• Spirit)

When faced with unbeatable odds, as the Fallen were at the climax of World War II, the most powerful Nephandi have been known to rip gateways through the material world which allow them to escape to distant Realms, into the Qlippoth, or beyond the Horizon itself. Such feats are deeply vulgar, of course, and demand mastery of their essential Spheres. The rituals involved require patience and care; while quick departures are possible for incredibly powerful mages, the risks involved in hasty casting are...severe.

System: The rules involved are simple enough; success, however, demands at least 10 successes on a vulgar magick roll. Any mage with a lick of sense, then, employs a ritual to gather the required successes, as described in Mage 20, pp. 538-543. Storywise, the Nephandus lays out the appropriate setting for the rite, gathers assistants if he can, and opens a path to his destination. One turn after the caster escapes, the gateway closes...possibly leaving a bunch of confused associates behind to suffer the displeasure of those who try to prevent the Fallen One's escape.

Paradox backlashes from this ritual are usually enough to blast the caster into ashes, pitch him into a hell-realm he didn't want to go to, or summon something extremely unpleasant. Regardless of the details, failure becomes a veritable flying-pan-fire scenario.

### Devil's Advocate (•••• Entropy, ••• Mind)

Confronted with a potent argument, even ideas can die. And because obliviating hope is a major aim of Nephandic ideals, this calamitous argument constitutes an especially favored (though admittedly uncommon) tactic among eloquent gilledians and aswadim. Putting forward a convincing counterargument, the Fallen debater can use conceptual entropy to erode not only a person's vital convictions but her desire to believe in anything at all. In its place, that Devil's Advocate can construct a philosophy so convincing that his victim finds herself agreeing with him even when that concept runs against every fiber of what she used to regard as her beliefs.

If indeed, the Fallen have infiltrated and corrupted the heart of their rival factions, this compelling enchantment played a major role in that victory. Oh, it's hard to wear down a mage's core beliefs — damnably hard. Given sufficient skill, charisma, social savvy and philosophical appeal, however, it can be, and has been, done.

System: To set this spell in motion, the Master simply talks. It's helpful, though not essential, if the speaker holds a certain degree of authority over his audience. As he weaves his argument (in game terms, using Social or Mental Attributes and Knowledge Abilities that fit the speaker's approach), the Mind 3 Effect works the argument deep into the listener's consciousness. Soon, the Entropy Effect begins to break down her previous convictions and replace them with Nephandic ideas. The spell can work with Entropy 5 alone, but the Mind 3 element makes the argument go down easier and helps the Fallen One seem especially convincing when he builds new ideas in place of the old.

Game-wise, the Storyteller rolls the caster's Arete against a difficulty of the target's Willpower + 3. (If the target is a mage or one of the Night-Folk, the difficulty rises to Willpower + 5.) An eloquent argument, of course, can lower that difficulty considerably — see "Abilities Enhancing Magick" in Mage 20, p. 533.

The number of successes needed depends on the convictions under siege: It takes one or two successes to break down or build up a passing fancy; two or three successes to instill or dismiss a simple concept; four or five successes to dig out and replace a complex idea or strong conviction; and more than five successes to uproot deep-rooted, perhaps fanatical, faith and replace it with a similar level of dedication to the new philosophy.

This sort of argument works best over time. An immediate assault on deep-held ideals tends to put the target on guard. Spread out through a series of conversations, however (ruleswise, an extended roll), **Devil's Advocate** can change the course

of a person's essential beliefs and personality. Employed while gaslighting a person, this spell can reconstitute her sense of reality in ways that would otherwise seem impossible. Because it *does* depend on compelling conversation and influence, though, the spell's Effects remain completely coincidental.

Given a position of influence and a receptive audience, this **Devil's Advocate** enchantment can affect numerous people, across great distances, or through suitable media such as TV, radio, or the internet. For further details about **Conceptual Entropy** and its potential consequences on settings and stories, see the entry of that name in **How Do You** DO **That?** pp. 134-136.

# Invoke the Caul (•••• Prime, ••• Spirit, ••• Entropy)

Although these Qlippothic entryways appear of their own accord, the Fallen cultivate their appearance by consecrating potential "flowerbeds" with gory atrocities, hellish violations, and showers of life force released by prodigious amounts of blood and torment. Such festivities greet the foundation of

a new Labyrinth, and although a Flower of Rebirth may not manifest in that spot, the dark celebrations often create a small Node of especially revolting Resonance and nauseating Tass: blood-drenched roses, mangled-limb flower blossoms, heaps of festering gory feces, disemboweled corpse remains, and similarly grotesque reflections of the atrocities performed at that site.

System: As the ritual entices a breach between the material world and the gaping Nightside's maw, Prime 5 channels Quintessence from the lives of slaughtered victims, Spirit 4 reaches toward Qlippothic Realms, and Entropy 3 skews probability in favor of the Caul's appearance. Although the Otherworldly portal appears (or *does not* appear) at the Storyteller's discretion, a large number of successes makes it likely that a Caul will indeed manifest.

If nothing else, the carnage will probably generate a Node, as detailed under the entry "Opening a Node or Conflux" in **How Do You DO That?** p. 44. And as mentioned above, that Node and its energies reflect the atrocities that brought them into existence.

# Diverse Items of Fell Nature and Sinister Aspect



Beyond the toxic magicks practiced by a mage, the Fallen have extensive arsenals of foul gifts with which to perpetrate their agendas. Most of those Wonders seem innocuous enough; especially if the Nephandus in question is working undercover, he's more likely to use standard-issue Technocratic gear or traditional mystic items than portable hellgates or blood-dripping scythes. When need be, though, Nephandi and their allies can call

upon some truly nasty stuff. The following items are just the tip of a very dark iceberg and, as with all icebergs, the most destructive things are the ones you'll never see coming.

For an extensive treatment about Wonders and the optional rules surrounding them, see The Book of Secrets, pp. 139-165.

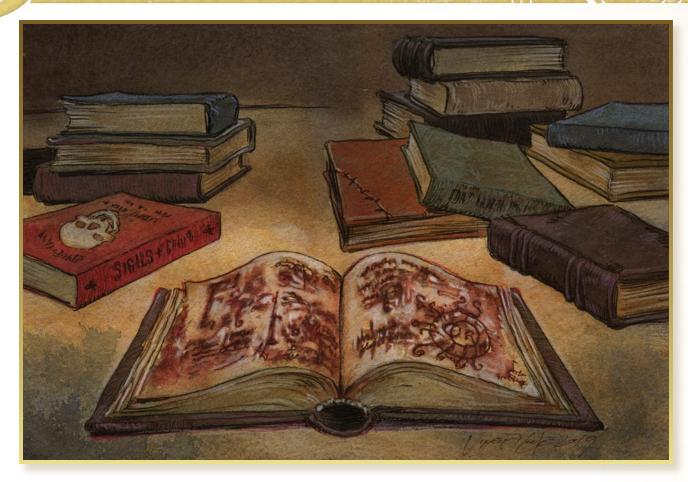
### Black Books

In the old days, occult tomes were forbidden works of art, traditionally written and illustrated by hand, though occasional concessions to printing presses would be made in the late Renaissance era. Possession of such works was a capital offense in many cultures, with mystic and religious writings consigned to flames from Boston to Kolkata, generally along with their owners, authors, and publishers. The destruction wasn't limited to Black Magic tomes in Europe, either. Spanish conquistadores burnt Aztec codices, Japan and

Madagascar burned Bibles and Christians alike, and the final burning of Alexandria's oft-torched archives was reputedly performed on the orders of Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab, though certain accounts contradict that claim. Perhaps, as certain Hermetic and Batini maintain, the caliph ordered only *certain* books burnt...works perhaps associated with the blasphemous practices of Nephandi. Whatever the truth might be, infamous "black books" are essential elements of magical lore. Many such works are simply collections of writing by people who ran afoul of the authorities. Some, however, truly *are* as dangerous as legends claim.

Funny thing about new-millennium publishing: Anyone with the means to do so can take previously rare, forbidden works — the sort of thing a person could be burnt alive for possessing a few centuries ago — self-publish them, and then sell them on the internet. Print-on-demand technology, digitalized books, websites, torrented books, online videos...the 21st century provides unlimited access to knowledge that had been rare, hazardous, and nearly impossible to find until now. That store of knowledge keeps increasing, too, with authors and bloggers releasing new media every day. The Eaters of the Weak would be fools to resist such opportunities. And whatever else they might be, the Fallen are seldom fools.

Today's occult-media marketplace overflows with works of questionable morality and potentially awful consequences. Most of this information is garbage, but a dedicated (or unfortunate) seeker can find sources of true power and malign



influence. The following entries represent a sliver of "the real stuff." There's more out there, though.

In game terms, many of the following "black books" are simply books with disturbing and potentially corrupting content. A character could pick up some useful Abilities from certain books (see "Raising and Learning Traits," Mage 20, pp. 336-337), and is bound to catch at least a nightmare or two unless she's inured to the influence of uncanny reading matter. A few of these works, however, count as *Grimoires* (detailed in The Book of Secrets, pp. 143-144) with regards to increasing certain Abilities and other potential effects. These books, of course, are rarer and more unusual than simple periodicals. Given the current level of access to such information, however, even the most potent books with Nephandi-inspired content are more common now than ever before.

# Akaa' Et Nuon Ta / "Cry of the World" (••• or •••• Grimoire)

Once an incredibly obscure work of Sumerian black magick, the *Akaa Et Nuon Ta* remained a fixture of infernal occult libraries until a copy was translated into English during the New Age book boom of the late 1990s. Since then, this venerable work has been released in four editions by Moru Raven Press: a mundane "budget" trade paperback in English; an elaborate and illustrated leather-bound hardback in English;

a mystically illuminated leather-bound edition in Greek; and the rarest and most expensive one of all, a similar edition in Akkadian cuneiform. The first two are merely informative, if obtuse to people who aren't well-versed in occult lore. The two high-end editions, however, feature illustrations that "come to life" and perform uncanny rites and disturbing tableaus whose significance becomes even more unnerving when the reader understands what she sees.

The English editions of this book have no special properties, although a reader can brush up on her Cosmology and Occult if she manages to understand the rather obtuse text. The Greek version, however, functions as a three-dot Grimoire, and the Akkadian one is four. Each version of the book helps the reader learn Cosmology, Esoterica (Sumerian Demonolgy), Esoterica (Ancient Prophecy), and Occult. The high-end "moving pictures" editions also help the readers learn Esoterica (Qlippoth) and Esoterica (Sumerian High Ritual) — assuming, of course, that she can understand the languages in question. All editions convey a disquieting sensation... but then, most people who'd get their hands on such a book are probably used to that sort of thing by now.

### The Annotated Protocols of Damian

For over a century, the *Precepts of Damian* have provided guidance and an ethical foundation for members of the

Technocratic Union. Commentaries on those rules exist, of course, none of which are more quietly contentious than The Annotated Protocols of Damian: A collection of notes, anecdotes, personal commentary and historical data surrounding the Precepts, their creator, and the circumstances behind the authorship and acceptance of that esteemed document. According to the Protocols, Damian himself (identified within the book as one Sir Walter Reginald Keyes) believed in a ruthless Union that would demolish all opposition and establish an enlightened global empire in which all forms of superstitionism would be forbidden by force of law and arms. Religions were to be banned, temples destroyed, and all offending clergy and believers brought to heel or theatrically slain. "Blowing from a gun" – the favored practice of executing rebels and deserters in India by tying them to the front of cannons and then blasting their limbs and innards everywhere — is described as "that most efficacious solution" to stubborn mystics of all kinds. As ruthless as the Technocracy often is, The Protocols suggest it ought to be more ruthless still. Operatives who favor this unauthorized work are said to be the most brutal of their kind, with the infamous "lightning Pogrom" of the late 1990s being directly inspired by The Protocols.

So of course, this book is a Nephandic forgery.

There was no Sir Walter Reginald Keyes. His entire history and record within the Union were invented. The book itself was authored by a handful of Fallen Technocrats during the reorganization of the late 1800s, a reorganization that was itself inspired and pursued thanks to the inspiration of this book. In certain regards, the modern Technocracy is a product of this Fallen prank — a prank made sweeter by the Union's own penchant for altering and inventing history to suit its needs. Although The Protocols is officially proscribed within the Technocratic ranks, and have been placed on a list of "questionable data" that is not to be trusted, Technocrats of all levels have at least heard of, if not read, the book, its contents, and the secrets it reveals. A good many of them follow the advice laid down within the book, and they consider Sir Keyes to have been the man who perhaps understood best what the Union needed to become in order to succeed.

Circulated as a nondescript paperback book, a collection of papers, or some other hard-to-trace medium (not, as one might expect, as a computer file), *The Protocols* has the old-school forbidden cachet of a porn magazine under an 8th-grader's mattress. Possession of a copy is, of course, officially forbidden... and so, naturally, many Technocrats own one. Although the book lacks any sort of magickal enchantment, the contents are designed to appeal to the most authoritarian Technocratic impulses, with "facts" and philosophies that justify all manner of excess in pursuit of a perfect world under Technocratic command.

### The Blargarian Mythos

Squaid Blargo went beyond mere pornography. A pseudonymous scribe in the late medieval era, Blargo crafted some of the most abhorrent porn ever written, often featuring illustrations, to boot. His books were burned whenever possible, and they became cherished collectors' items for connoisseurs of the grotesque. The Marquis de Sade is reputed to have been inspired by Squaid Blargo, and endeavored (in his view, unsuccessfully) to surpass it in extremity. Blargo's blend of carnality, blasphemy, authentic black magic rituals, and gleeful mockery of the Church and noble classes made him a lost treasure of jaded decadents.

And then the internet discovered him, soon adding immeasurably to his foul corpus.

In the manner of Lovecraft, Howard, and other authors whose mythos have been expanded by subsequent writers, Squaid Blargo has become a fixture of internet fanfic, digital and print-on-demand publications. Before the company took it down, a certain online colossus hosted a brief craze of digital "Blargoverse" fiction, all dripping with Squaid's hallmark infernalist sadism and contempt for humanity. Although the titles are no longer available in that marketplace, a quick websearch will turn up hundreds of titles associated with what has come to be called "the Blargian mythos."

Expressed in titles like Harem of 10,000 Screams, The Slave and the Iron, and The Warm Velvet Sheathe; or, Where We Put the Blade, Blargo's authentic oeuvre (or at least as "authentic" an oeuvre as one can compile for an unknown author) has been released in paperback, hardback, and digital editions. To them, newer authors have added works like The Third Tongue of Baphomet, The Abyssal Choir, and A Death of One Million Cuts. Signatures of these tales include ripe prose, florid descriptions of horrific and typically sexual tortures, infernal rites, violation of taboos, excoriating philosophies, and a pervasive air of sardonic loathing for humanity...a perfect celebration, then, of the Nephandic perspective. Illustrations are common, of course, with many of them looking too realistic to be staged and too excruciating to be consensual.

Despite their explicit rituals and demonic characters, there's nothing "magickal" about these books. The influence they hold on a growing audience, however, serves the Fallen agenda even when the majority of those authors, perhaps even Squaid Blargo himself, are not initiated Nephandi. When so many authors and artists delve so enthusiastically into Blargo's approach — and appear to do so with a body count — the erosion of human decency doesn't need magick to be effective.

### The Ebon Broomstick Series

Profiteering off the popular fascination with occultism is not limited to the Fallen; most authors in the field convey banal misinformation and the occasional snippet of authentic lore, and a handful actually make a pretty decent living off doing so. Dana Flaherty, however, managed to slip a disquieting amount of authentic black magic into his popular Ebon Broomstick series: The Ebon Broomstick, To Wield an Ebon Broomstick, To Fly an Ebon Broomstick, Secrets of the Ebon

Broomstick, The Young Adept's Ebon Broomstick, and The Ebon Broomstick Grimoire, Volumes I, II, and III. Published at great profit by Hooded Lantern Press, the last four books of the series were written in collaboration with Flaherty's partner and lover Francisca Young, who took over the series entirely after Dana's gruesome death in 2011. Since that time, Young has expanded the series with The Ebon Broomstick Ritual Kit, The Young Adept's Ebon Broomstick Ritual Kit, and the Ebon Broomstick series of teen-lit novels — The Eyes Open, The Ebon Path, and The Flower of Rebirth — which are no less than an ongoing, barely fictionalized depiction of a Nephandic apprenticeship, Awakening, and Descent through a Caul.

Although none of these books are magickal in any way, a reader could learn or increase her Esoterica (Black Magick) and Occult Knowledges from reading them. On a more insidious level, the books encourage the sort of self-centered, predatory ruthlessness that characterizes the Nephandic philosophy... and given that the Ebon Brookstick series has sold hundreds of thousands of copies, with fanatical devotees (most of them young) all over the world, it casts a faint but rather long shadow across the world of modern occult periodicals.

### The Six Seals of Ganzir (\*\*\* Grimoire)

One of the most powerful "black books" of the Mythic Ages, the Six Seals originated as a now-lost Babylonian demonology text which was later translated into Arabic, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. The latter version is more often referred to as the Six Seals of Solomon instead, but although the surrounding cautions and explanations are rooted in Jewish mysticism the rituals are identical. In all editions, the book details six demons (Amurru, Angu, Asakku, Lamastu, Pazuzu, and Sykora), along with the rituals for summoning, binding, and dismissing them with some modicum of success, as detailed under "Summoning, Bargaining, Binding, and Warding" in How Do You DO That? (pp. 90-106).

In addition to the essential rites and information, the *Six Seals* presents an overview of the following Traits which, in game terms, the reader may learn or improve through reading the text: Cosmology, Esoterica (Demonology), Esoterica (High Ritual), and Lore (Spirits). An infernal magus may gain Arete without a Seeking, and can improve her Spirit Sphere as described in the Grimoires entry of **The Book of Secrets**. Many editions of this eldritch tome are bound in human skin and inked with human blood, although the Hebrew version, it's worth noting, is never crafted this way. Most editions have been possessed by six distinctly different winds which turn the pages — one wind for each demon named therein.

### The Hunter and the Prey (•• Primer)

Winners are hunters. Losers are prey. Such is the wisdom of the Mammonite celebrity Michael Hunter Grey, author and speaker for the Hunters Pride Corporation: a go-getter motivational business-consultation firm that spreads a gospel of corporate success through predatory tactics. His Hunter's

Laws series — The Wisdom of the Hunter, The Eye of the Hunter, Laws of the Hunter, and his crowning achievement, The Hunter and the Prey—have sold millions of copies in a dozen languages, and they're considered to be the modern commandments of success culture. Distilling social interactions to a binary predator/ prey equation, Grey has become a guru to executives, politicians, celebrities, and would-be celebrities of all kinds.

Most of Grey's advice boils down to "Fuck them over before they fuck you over" — and in Grey's world, *everybody*'s out to get you unless they're too weak to be anything but prey for everybody else. In Grey's estimation, however, most people are prey by default, and the only people who become successful are those who step out of the everyman's shadow and become the lions in a field of lambs. There's nothing especially novel about his "wisdom"; Grey himself admits he cribbed it from power players throughout history. He knows his way around a catchphrase, though, and so Michael Hunter Grey has become rich and powerful teaching others to become rich and powerful, too.

Grey is, of course, a Nephandus — and a minor-league one, at that. He's far more interested in personal wealth and fame than in advancing his Arts in any other degree. What he lacks in magickal might, however, he commands in mortal influence...and no other "black book" is more influential than *The Hunter and the Prey*.

Although his earlier works introduce and hone "the hunter's gaze," it's *The Hunter and the Prey* that brings Grey's vision to ultimate success. In addition to the persuasive writing and established concepts, *Prey* introduces an ominous element of mass-produced technomagick: in **Mage** terms, the book is a *Primer*: a book that provides insights that can Awaken a slumbering Avatar and perhaps point it in a useful direction. (For details, see **The Book of Secrets**, pp. 146-147.) Yes, Michael Hunter Grey has unlocked a horrifying new door in the Ascension War: A book that's creating a small but growing number of Nephandic mages.

For the most part, the millions of people who've read Grey's work remain Asleep. An attentive reader can pick up some pointers for learning or increasing their Manipulation, Intimidation, Leadership or Seduction, but that's the only game effect the book will have upon the average reader. A handful of folks, however, feel the stirrings of something more... and among that handful, a handful Awaken and embrace the predatory Path that Grey's work so eagerly proclaims. Even those readers who do not become Nephandi per se get a thorough, eloquent schooling in social games manship, backed by a philosophy in which no one wins except the one who goes for the throat. Even without the potential boost toward Dark Enlightenment, however, The Hunter and the Prey gives malevolent advice to folks predisposed to put it into action. Everyone within their sphere of influence – coworkers, employees, partners, parents, lovers, neighbors, kids, winds up on the receiving end...and because abused people may become abusers too, the cycle grows, spreads, and picks up speed.

### The Malleus Nefandorum (•••• Grimoire)

The Hammer of Nephandi, that infamous treatise on "knowing your enemy," so respected for the knowledge it contains and yet abhorred for the influence it exerts on those who read it. A legendary text, to be sure...for some, the only text that matters with regards to the Fallen. Originating by mysterious means in the sixth century, this ominous tome has been traced to the Sebel-el-Mafouh Whash, an earlier volume described below. Malleus, however, has a nasty secret which has, over time, become more widely known than it used to be:

It's not a book about stalking Nephandi; it's a book Nephandi use to stalk new recruits.

The *Hammer* is a trap; baited with precious information (most of it wrong anyway), this grimoire exerts a subtle yet pervasive corruption upon Awakened readers. Although it confers a certain degree of occult lore, the primary value of this book comes through its ability to deceive the reader with misinformation while tapping into his darkest shadows and turning those forbidden secrets against him. Reading a copy of the handcrafted true Grimoires (as opposed to cheaply published, mass-produced, or internet-circulated English versions of the text) unspools devious and complex enchantments that burrow into the aspects of a mage's personality that he most desperately wishes to deny. There, the tendrils of influence take root, nurturing his selfishness, egotism, sadism, and ruthlessness while undercutting mercy, logic, and faith in something other than himself.

Rumors place the authorship of the Malleus in the hands of a Persian mage known only as "Bubaces." Reputedly a Batini barabbus, Bubaces labored on the original Persian manuscript for seven years, producing a number of "early drafts" which later provided a still-growing corpus of material associated with the Malleus. The many misconceptions about the Fallen come from a combination of deliberate misinformation and these subsequent books on the subject. Eventually, Bubaces produced nine "true Hammers," distributed them across the Mediterranean via demonic servitors, and then walled himself up alive inside the cave where he lived. These works held a collection of corruption-spells; those who read the Malleus, its translations, and the many copies made from those nine original books, becomes obsessed with the book, its contents, and the entire idea of the Nephandi. As with The Annotated Protocols of Damian, above, the book burrows its way into the reader's shadow, takes hold, and inspires her worst aspects to come to the fore.

In game terms, the *Malleus* exerts a pervasive combination of the spells **The Art of Seduction**, **Blur Truth**, **Constant Cravings**, and **Devil's Advocate** (all detailed above) upon Awakened readers who study its contents. Sleepers who read the book will find it disturbing, even compelling, and fall prey to the Art of Seduction and Blur Truth enchantments even though they're not susceptible to the tome's most destructive properties. A magus, however, eventually feels the

pull of the text. At first, it seems merely fascinating, then important, and then, vital. By roughly halfway through the text, she'll probably refuse to be parted with it, suffering constant cravings (as described on p. XX) for the book and the insights it contains. Those insights, of course, are both factually incorrect and psychologically corrupting. Soon, the reader sees Nephandi everywhere except in her mirror; by then, however, the book has essentially convinced her that the Nephandic Path is the only true form of enlightenment, and that walking it herself is the only way to destroy the Fallen for good. Of course, she thinks, she's strong enough to resist its temptations – what do you think she is, stupid? Although fortunate readers with high Willpower can resist the Hammer's draw, most readers find themselves bathed in the blood of those they once loved, walking in a feverish daze toward the thing they swore to destroy.

Lesser copies of the book — that is, the mass-produced English translations or the digital copies on the internet — still exert a faint but constant draw upon the reader. In this case, however, it's **The Art of Seduction** and **Blur Truth** spells, influencing an unAwakened reader instead. Although these "lesser *Hammers*" don't command the full potency of Bubaces' enchantments, a casual reader could easily become obsessed and corrupted by the book and its contents. And although it's not considered a Primer as such, the chances that possession of (and by) the *Malleus* could trigger a dark Awakening are potentially alarming.

Part of the book's payoff includes the ability to teach or upgrade a character's Esoterica (Black Magick), Esoterica (Qlippoth), and Lore: Nephandi Traits. As mentioned above, it could trigger an Awakening, too. In all editions, the Malleus manifests a strong and ugly Temperamental Resonance (detailed in The Book of Secrets, p. 138) which echoes the reader's worst personality traits. The lesser Hammers exert a small amount of influence, and the true, hand-scribed Grimoires radiate such influence to a distressing degree. If your group employs the optional rules described in the Resonance section of The Book of Secrets, a lesser copy has one or two dots of such Resonance, while the true Grimoires possess four or five dots instead. In all editions, The Hammer of Nephandi is a nasty piece of work. Smart mages will burn the damn thing on sight if they ever catch sight of it but very few mages are that smart, really, and the ones who consider themselves most immune to such tricks are the ones who fall for them most easily.

### The Sebel-el-Mafouh Whash ("The Path of the Voracious Beast")

To fight demons, one might have to become a demon himself. So advises *The Path of the Voracious Beast*, an account of the infernal plague now known as *the Devil-King Age* and the methods used to end it. That vicious conflict saw atrocities on all sides, and this book does not hesitate to describe them in nauseating detail. According to the book's attributed authors,

however, those butcheries and torments were justified by the indescribable savagery of the opponents. Is that self-serving propaganda? Very likely. Even so, the extremity worked. The Devil-King Age finally ended, albeit in a festival of blood that included impalements, eviscerations, trees constructed out of severed limbs, and a festival of scaphism during which, according to the *Path*, over 100 boats were floated at once, each filled with the honey-basted body of a human being slowly eaten alive by insects, birds, and fish while stewing in his own effluvia under the merciless Persian sun.

But it *worked*, didn't it? That's what they say, anyhow. The Fallen and their infernal pawns and masters were driven out or exterminated and the people lived in peace.

That's what they say.

Credited to the Batini sages Abbah Rabbiniath and Frater Decimus, the Sebel-el-Mafouh Whash drips with allegorical stories, symbolist passages, cultural references now obscure even to Persian historians, and lots of gruesome accounts of the methods employed to end the demonic scourge. The odd linguistic and cultural artifacts scattered throughout the book (including the names of its supposed authors) suggest yet another Nephandic forgery, especially given the Path's inspiration on the infamous Malleus Nefandorum. That said, the savagery described in the Path is typical of medieval warfare and punishment, and certainly the Middle East – home of the skin-draped pyramids of ancient Sumeria and the bronze saws and brick kilns through which the Hebrews punished their enemies — is no stranger to sadistic carnage. Surely, this book could not have been used to justify such treatment of prisoners, or to encourage its readers to indulge in atrocities if the cause is holy enough, right?

In game terms, there's nothing magickal about the Sebelel-Mafouh Whash. Copies of it (some of them guite different from one another) can be found in many Chantry archives and the personal collections of mages who've spent their lives combatting the Fallen plague. Even the Technocracy has employed this book as a historical document useful for combatting Nephandi. The Path has been translated into several dialects of English, German, Latin, French, Arabic, Mandarin, Japanese, Greek, and Russian. Although many of the more Islam-centric passages have been revised or removed, the Path is considered to be perhaps the second-most efficacious volume employed by mages who fight the Fallen. A few copies have even made it into unAwakened hands and book collections, which raises the question: Is this popularity due to the information featured in the book, to the gruesome techniques detailed within, to the historical curiosity it represents for modern historians, or perhaps to some other factor altogether?

### The Squirebook (.. Grimoire)

Ostensibly a handbook for a medievalist order called the Knights of the Inner Circle, *The Squirebook* is a creation of the early 1980s and a fringe offshoot of the Society of Creative

Anachronism. Thrown out of the SCA for "dishonorable, perverse, and illegal activities," the Knights formed an outlaw organization in which live-steel fighting, hands-on brawls, widespread sexual assault, and actual slavery were common among the membership. The founders drew their primary inspiration from John Norman's Gor series, the film Excalibur, a devotion to the bloodier side of Conan fandom, and the then-rare classic of ruthlessness Might is Right, plus a distinctly Black Metal strain of rock 'n' roll Satanism. Although the Knights shattered into a half-dozen literally warring factions in the 1990s (racking up several disappearances, a few murder cases, and a ghastly incident involving an actual torture chamber and a cache of body parts discovered years later beneath a vacant house), The Squirebook was copied, scanned, amended, and distributed through a network of medievalist organizations and online groups until a new edition was published through Moru Raven Press in 2010. Since then, it's become a standard inspiration for "hardcore" dark medievalist groups who favor a decidedly old-school approach...meaning, in this case, cults with strong emphases on sex, violence, and ruthless domination.

The book's contents feature an unnerving mashup of sexism, child abuse, feral philosophizing, pseudo-history, dark paganism, white supremacy, and black magic. According to The Squirebook, the value of men is measured by their ability to take and deal out beatings, women are to be faithful subjects of their Lords and Masters, and children are to be subjected to endless physical and mental battering in order to break their spirits or toughen them up. Nature is an implacable force ruled by old gods of mangled Nordic aspect, and Christianity is an oppressive lie, to be opposed and overthrown by all available means. The book is filled with a hodgepodge of mangled medieval quotations, excerpts from pulp fantasy novels, prodigious hunks of Ragnar Redbeard's infamous treatise, and the observations of the original Knights and their various descendants. The book also features torture techniques and a variety of rituals, most of which involve some combination of bloody sexual conquest. Although the majority of those rituals are gibberish, a few have been adopted from authentic grimoires. As a result, The Squirebook functions as a two-dot Grimoire with regards to the Occult, Esoterica (Black Magic), Esoterica (Sex Magick), Intimidation, and Torture Abilities. Although The Squirebook lacks a paranormal element, its text, image and philosophies appeal to people who're convinced that modern egalitarianism has sapped humanity of its primal virtues and dominating spirit.

### The Thirteen Hours

Genevieve Le Blanc was one of the more notorious *Decadanti* of a literally Decadent scene. A belle of the French artistic underground in the mid-to-late 1800s, Le Blanc began her career as an Ecstatic mage whose tastes for intoxicating substances and experience led her to the darkest corners of that era. Her journey to the Cauls and beyond is described in heavily symbolic terms in her subversive masterwork *La* 

Treizième Heure (The Thirteen Hours), a novel now considered to be a surreal classic of the era's Decadent literature. After sporadic editions and moral suppressions, the book currently enjoys a new popularity thanks to a gorgeously illustrated edition from Moru Raven Press.

Most readers consider the book's lush depictions of bestial sex in florid woodlands, sybaritic demon-fucking, treacherous woodlands filled with ravenous partners, and ritual orgies under a pregnant moon to be symbolic revelations or absinthe-hazed fever dreams. They are neither. Mages familiar with the lower reaches of the Qlippoth recognize the setting of those scenes as the Dominions of Lilith and Samael. Genevieve Le Blanc spent a good deal of time in those realms, and her eventual disappearance around the turn of the 20th century may have involved a one-way trip into the Tree of Knowledge – a Tree whose wonders she lays out in carnal detail. Long considered a work of Victorian pornography, The Thirteen Hours is, in fact, an occult journey through sensual torments and delights. An attentive reader who understands the book's barely-coded references might learn a thing or two about the Olippoth and its associated rituals — in game terms, Esoterica specialties for Black Magick, Olippoth, and Sex Magick – if he can unravel the book's dreamlike tone in its original French writing. The English translations lack the poetic beauty of Le Blanc's eloquent words, and although a reader who's familiar with the occult might discern a bit of basic Qlippothic lore in the text, the deeper levels become obvious in the book's original language. The most renowned editions, then, are those published in French and shelved in the company of Huysmans, Rops, Rimbaud and, of course, the Marquis de Sade.

# Malevolent Treasures and Infernal Devices

Demonic pentacles. Spiked weapons dipped in liquid flame. Blood-drenched altars of appalling sacrifice. Such are the tools folks expect when dealing with Nephandi. And because that is what people expect, the most useful weapons in a Fallen arsenal are innocuous tools of subtle yet pervasive influence.

There *are* times, of course, when it's time to bring the hellfire down. Most often, though, Fallen mages and their agents employ instruments of deception and misdirection. After all, who's going to inspect a mail truck for missing children, consider a bandanna the spark that ignites a riot, or look past the face and voice of a person you *expect* to see, and find instead a stranger on a deadly errand at your expense? Although Nephandi have been known (especially beyond the Gauntlet, where subtlety makes less of a difference) to use strange tools of diabolical aspect, the weapons you're most likely to encounter when facing the Eaters of the Weak are things that seem perfectly innocent until the moment of blood and fire begins.

The most ominous element of the following Wonders,

of course, is how cool and practical they seem. Wouldn't it be useful, after all, to have collars that compelled obedience, or "love bombs" that could inspire joy rather than hatred? And yet although mages of other factions find such tools intriguing — sometimes using variants of their own — each one of these dark treasures is based on robbing other people of autonomy, manipulating them without knowledge or consent, and pushing them toward a conclusion that's useful for the Nephandus and probably destructive to the people in his path.

"But that's just the way of the world, though, isn't it? Those with power use it to get what they want and need."

Of course. That's exactly what they want you to think.

Because most of these Wonders are not intended for player-character use, Background Costs have been omitted from many of the following entries.

### •• The Catcher-Snatcher (Device)

### Arete N/A, Quintessence N/A, Background Cost N/A

Bloody rituals need victims. Experiments need test-subjects. The Pipers need slaves. To such ends, the Fallen and their allies use specialized vehicles to capture, hold and transport people who are, shall we say, less than willing to partake in the gory sacraments of infernal butchery.

Traditionally crafted as wagons, coaches, and carriages (often black), the modern versions of these wheeled prisons come in a variety of makes and models: touring buses, ambulances, 18-wheelers, utility trucks, police cars and paddy wagons, limousines, Humvees, SUVs and, of course, the infamous "Suspicious" Van. Blending in with the motorized crowd — often with an air of bland ubiquity or ominous authority — a "Catcher-Snatcher" cruises around while its drivers search for likely targets. The golden age of hitchhiking provided a ready stream of victims; these days, though, prospective targets have become warier, and so the snatchers now rely on homeless people, joggers, kids walking to and from school, stranded motorists, college students, folks preoccupied with their phones, and anybody else who might be grabbed up and slammed in with relatively little fuss.

Once inside, a victim soon discovers that the Catcher-Snatcher is essentially a soundproof, damage-resistant wheeled prison. The doors and windows won't open, screams remain silenced, and no amount of slamming or bashing weakens the vehicle's stability. Worst of all, no one seems to care about what's happening inside. The Catcher-Snatcher can meander through traffic with a half-dozen screaming kids inside, and no one outside the vehicle pays it any mind.

From a magickal standpoint, the Catcher-Snatcher starts out as an essentially normal vehicle of its kind — especially well-made, perhaps, but otherwise normal. An array of magickal procedures (either old-school or hypertech, depending on the crafting practices involved) reinforce the interior, frame, windows, and locks. Additional procedures create a field of soundproofing or silence within the vehicle, weave a "nothing

to see here" mental impulse into the vehicle itself, and blur the license plate so that anyone attempting to track the vehicle will see a slightly different number each time they look at the plate. A light-deflection coating keeps people from seeing clearly into the vehicle, and generally does so without the conspicuous application of tinted or one-way glass. Thus, whatever happens in the vehicle stays within the vehicle, and a captured victim won't be going anywhere until the Catcher-Snatcher stops and the drivers extract their soon-to-be plaything from the bowels of this awful-yet-innocuous machine.

**System:** The Sphere Effects involved in this Device's construction are frighteningly simple: Matter 2 to reinforce the body, Forces 2 to deflect and dampen sound and light, Mind 2 to project the *Ignore me* field, and a combined Matter 2, Forces 2, and Mind 2 Effect to scramble perceptions of the license plate.

Creating the Device is a time-and-labor-intensive project, to be certain — a process that, as detailed in **The Book of Secrets** (pp. 151-161), demands Prime 4 as well. A few dots in Crafts (Automotive Mechanics) are important too unless the Fallen mages involved are using occult rituals instead of mechanical modifications. Anyone, Awakened or otherwise, can drive this machine — the Effects are built into the body, not activated by the operator. Some Catcher-Snatchers maintain a disconcerting field of silence within the vehicle, while others simply deaden the sound and light waves between the machine's interior and exterior.

The Matter-reinforced body adds +4 to the Durability and Structure of the vehicle in question (see Mage 20, p. 460) without adding obvious bulk or armor to that machine. In order to penetrate the sound-dampening Effects, a victim or would-be witness must score at least four successes on the appropriate rolls to do so — a Strength roll to hammer on the vehicle loud enough to be heard, a Perception roll to see through the obscuring magicks, and so forth. (Difficulty 7 to break through the enchantment.) Most folks outside the vehicle won't bother trying to look beyond its innocent exterior. After all, there's nothing unusual about that car or van, nothing at all.

For vehicular rules and an array of potential vehicles, see Mage 20, pp. 458-461.

### •• False Face (Talisman or Device)

Arete 4, Quintessence 20, Background Cost 6 pts.

Deception often depends upon appearing to be someone other than who you really are. While this is a simple trick for mages familiar with the Arts of Life or Mind, it's hard to fool cameras with mind tricks, and difficult to transform yourself unless you've achieved a fair degree of skill with the Life Sphere. Hence, the Fallen and their agents often employ this easy-application disguise: a thin, flexible mask of translucent film. Applied to the face and activated by a whispered command, the mask morphs across the wearer's face, exposed skin, and body. Through

a mental command, the wearer projects a desired appearance to the mask; within seconds, the wearer whole-body morphs to suit that description. Height, weight, gender, skin coloration — so long as the desired appearance is essentially human and presuming that the wearer communicated it successfully to the mask, the disguise is complete. Until the Quintessence runs out, or the wearer commands the mask to release its hold on her appearance, that person looks like someone else entirely.

System: This Wonder's power is simple: A Life 2 Effect performs cosmetic transformations according to the wearer's desires. A successful Arete roll creates the desired look, an unsuccessful one gets some of the features wrong, and a botched one garners the usual Paradox, and also results in a horrific or absurd transformation which remains "stuck" until the item's Quintessence store runs out.

Each successful or unsuccessful transformation costs one point of Quintessence; a botched transformation lasts for one hour per point of Quintessence in the Wonder at that time. Once the Quintessence runs out, the False Face has run its course and must be replaced.

Defined as a Device or Talisman, this Wonder takes one of two forms: either a nanite hypertech model (which is especially useful when infiltrating Technocracy Constructs and similar facilities), or a mystic Talisman prepared according to ancient customs. Both varieties function the same way, though the explanations about how and why they function differ. Either form of False Face may be used by unAwakened characters who've been trained to activate its capacities.

Massive alterations and full-body applications of a False Face remain vulgar even in technological regions of earthly reality – though not in places where the local reality has been attuned toward hypertech, like Technocratic strongholds or technomancer lab facilities. Given the prevalence of such disguises in popular media, however, minor transformations –adjusting a person's facial features or skin color, rather than their full-body shape — may be considered coincidental in tech-based, media-saturated Reality Zones. Meanwhile, a mystic False Face that's been crafted to suit an appropriate Reality Zone (like, for instance, a False Face carved in a culturally traditional manner out of wood, or worked from tanned, perhaps human, leather, and then employed in an area where such traditions run deep) could, again, affect minor changes while remaining coincidental, not vulgar.

For more details about such transformations, including the ability to successfully imitate another character, see the section dedicated to shapechanging in **How Do You DO That?** pp. 19-24.

### •• + Malign Cutlery (Trinket or Talisman)

Arete 2+, Quintessence 10+, Background Cost 4+ pts.

Titanic flaming swords. Barbed polearms. Jagged axes so vast that they should weigh more than the person wielding them. Such

malign cutlery is a standard fixture of Nephandic shock troops and the occasional combat-happy war wizard. These weapons are so huge and awkward that they seem absurd until one cuts you in half. Obviously, magick's involved in the creation of such war toys and occasionally involved in their deployment, too.

**System:** Because such weapons tend to be unique, this entry reflects a *type* of Wonder rather than a single Talisman or a group of similar ones. We encourage the Storyteller to come up with the details herself, both in order to keep her players guessing and to suit the nature of the Nephandic forces and their role in your story.

Rules-wise, these gargantuan weapons are crafted with Forces 2 and Matter 2 to refine their materials in conventionally impossible ways, and Forces 2 to alter the normal play of physics around their use. Thus, a six-foot character can swing a seven-foot sword whose sheer mass should, under normal conditions, pull her off her feet if she so much as hefts the damn thing. That magickal shaping keeps the cutlery unnaturally sharp, too, and allows the weapon to maintain its edge and functionality even when, for example, cutting through a brick wall. These functions are built into the weapons, and they require no Arete roll or Quintessence expenditures. Such weapons are two-dot Trinkets — that is, Wonders with a single innate property that any character can use. Although such functions defy earthly physics, there's nothing innately magickal about them and so these Trinkets do not generate Paradox when they're being used.

Certain Nephandic weapons have additional Effects, utilizing the following additional Spheres:

- Inflicting aggravated damage (Quintessence 2).
- Flaming, crackling with black electricity, or employing some other energetic attack in addition to the usual damage that weapon inflicts (Forces 3, Prime 2).
- Dripping with acid which inflicts aggravated damage and weakens structures when it hits them (Matter 3, Prime 2).
- Commanding shadows, banishing light, reflecting with dazzling light, and so forth (Forces 2).
- Invoking fear in those who behold them (Mind 3).
- Slashing through ephemeral as well as material targets (Spirit 3).
- Pulling Quintessence from the target and channeling it to the weapon's user (Prime 3).

These functions do employ magick, require an Arete roll, may invoke Paradox, and each cost one point of Quintessence per turn of use. Such actively magickal weapons are Talismans, not Trinkets, and although non-mages can use them, those unAwakened characters must be properly trained in the occult techniques which activate such eldritch properties.

A Talisman weapon that uses up to two Sphere Rank 2 Effects is a two-dot Wonder. A weapon that uses up to three Sphere Rank 3 Effects is a three-dot Wonder.

Especially powerful weapons might use higher-Rank Effects; a massive sword that annihilates the life force from its victim, for example, would use Prime 5 and become a five-dot Talisman which could potentially hold up to five different Effects.

With or without those additional powers, these ghastly armaments radiate a Malignant sort of Resonance. They tend to "collect" Quintessence through blood-sacrifices (as detailed in **How Do You** DO **That?** pp. 49-51) and must be periodically employed in grotesque rituals in order to keep them sharp, ready, and hungry for more.

### · The Riotizer (Charm or Gadget)

Arete 5, Quintessence N/A, Background Cost 3 pts. (per 10 units)

It just takes a little push. Tempers run high, violence is in the air, and one tiny psychic shove in the right direction sets the crowd off like a bomb. Especially in these times of ravening dissent, when it seems every citizen is aimed at every other one, this tiny social nuke has the most fascinating effect on people who are already ready to blow.

Crafted as one-use items, the Riotizer may be created as either an Enlightened hypertech Gadget or a mystic Charm, depending on the focus of the mage who crafts it. Regardless of the nature of the magicks involved, this malicious toy amplifies nearby emotions while tilting probabilities in the direction of violence. Shaped to appear as innocuous as possible, such items might be crafted as (or into) protest signs, bandannas, bottles of water, jackets, buttons, and so forth. The person detonating the Riotizer spots a potential flashpoint for a riot, moves as close to it as he dares to get, aims for that potential flashpoint, and activates the Wonder. Immediate ripples of violent passions and volatile probability wash out over the people within roughly 20 feet (seven meters) of the flashpoint. Unless someone's able to contain those passions in a hurry, the targeted area erupts into a riot within seconds.

Fallen agents (Awakened and otherwise) tend to carry a batch of these Wonders into potential riot situations, and then set them off in quick succession from different parts of the crowd. Once ignited, the resulting explosions of delectable chaos will be difficult, if not impossible, to contain.

System: Upon detonation, this malevolent plaything kicks off an Effect combining Correspondence 2 (to reach and affect a potentially distant flashpoint), Entropy 2 (to guide entropic energies and probabilities toward chaos), and Mind 2 (to intensify violent emotions within the affected area). The Storyteller rolls five dice for the Wonder's Arete and because spontaneous explosions of violence are expected in such situations, the difficulty for that roll is only 3 if the flashpoint already seems ripe for ignition. (The difficulty rises to 5 or 6 if the crowd is peaceful and dedicated

to nonviolence, because the magick works against the mood of that crowd.) More successes equal more violence...and because hate feeds on hate, the ensuing riot will probably be spectacular.

The Wonder itself is a simple, one-Effect weapon. Thanks to its extra Arete, however (which give the Riotizer a strong possibility of success), this Wonder has a higher Background point costs than its two-dot rating would normally demand.

### **Malign Weapons**

Weapon	Difficulty	Damage/Type
Titanic Sword	5	Strength +8/L
Massive Axe	6	Strength +9/L
Reaper Scythe	7	Strength +9/L
Wicked Polearm	6	Strength +7/L
Crushing Maul	7	Strength +10/B
Grotesque Spiked Club	6	Strength +7/L

All two-handed weapons; not concealable; minimum Strength of 3 to lift.

#### ••• FIDO (Device)

### Enlightenment 3, Quintessence 15, Background Cost N/A

Fidelitous Influence Disciplinary Object is a pretty tortured acronym, but it's not nearly as tortured as the people who resist its effects. Designed by Eldon Attara, a Mammonite technomancer who tried (unsuccessfully, as things turned out) to create a floating nation of his own in international waters, this stylish collar remains in high demand among ultra-wealthy plutocrats who've prepared themselves for global collapse by assembling permanent "associates" (read: virtual slaves) and equipping them with FIDOs as "merely as a security measure."

Sculpted in a fetching variety of chokers, FIDOS do nothing except look decorative...unless, of course, the person wearing a FIDO disobeys a perfectly reasonable order, tries to escape her situation, or rejects her host's hospitality by having the gall to attempt to kill him or something along those lines. In that case, FIDO performs its assigned task: making that ungrateful person wish she'd never been born.

When activated, FIDO "barks" to the tune of a breathtaking burst of pain. That pain continues for as long as the wearer continues to defy FIDO's master. This pain, of course, leaves no physical trace; we can't have those lovely hostesses scarred in unpleasant ways, after all, and bodyguards aren't much use if they've been maimed before their skills are called upon. Nope, that pain is literally "all in their heads." As soon as the defiant offender behaves herself, FIDO goes back to being a lovely piece of jewelry — sleek, stylish, and surely the envy of any fashionable person.

Each FIDO is specially programmed to respond to the requirements and desires of its master. That way, if he feels as though a stern lesson is necessary, he may activate FIDO as a preemptive measure to curb potential disobedience, as

a display of the rightful power he commands, or maybe just for a good laugh at parties. Really, FIDO's good for all kinds of tricks. Just don't try to take it off without the proper deactivation code, or you'll be sorry.

**System:** FIDO's "bite" involves a Mind 3 psychic assault, generated every turn the collar remains activated. The Device's Arete gets rolled against the difficulty of the target's Willpower, and the resulting successes inflict bashing damage as per the Base Damage or Duration chart in Mage 20, p. 504.

An associated Life 3, Mind 3, and Prime 2 Psychic Shatter Effect (as per that entry in How Do You DO That? p. 122) goes off if the character tries to remove the FIDO. Only the "master" knows the proper removal protocol, and anyone else who tries to mess with the collar inflicts aggravated damage instead of the usual bashing attack.

The master can inflict either type of damage at will, assuming he has access to a FIDO control pad. In reality, the pad simply allows non-mages to access FIDO's technomagickal capabilities. And because FIDO is a technomagickal Device whose effects are explained as "electrostatic disruption of neurosynaptic functions," FIDO's attacks are coincidental, not vulgar.

Each turn's usage expends one point of Quintessence. FIDO needs to be recharged at a special recharging station (provided with the collars) once all 15 charges have been expended. Very few living things, however, can withstand more than two or three "bites" from FIDO. While recharging, the collar must either be removed or (preferably) hooked up to the recharging station by a cable that runs between the station and a suitably restrained collar-wearing "associate."

As noted above, FIDOs come in an array of shapes and sizes which can be custom-fitted to each "associate." Such collars cost tens of thousands of dollars per unit, but the people who commission them can afford that easily. And although this Device is (currently) fictional, the idea for it came from a request by an actual tycoon who wanted, in real life, to commission such collars in order to keep his staff obedient after a theoretical economic collapse.

### ••• Gallu's Lash (Talisman)

### Arete 3, Quintessence 15, Background Cost N/A

Pain. Pleasure. The line between them blurs when sensual abandon when forbidden desires rise to the surface. And so, one of the more infamous tools in a Nephandic arsenal involves dealing out both sensations with a psychic ferocity which ignites a deeper craving for both.

Legend places the origins of this demon-fashioned instrument in the rituals of ancient Bhât, where it was used to break slaves, conquer enemies, and flog sacrificial victims to death in throes of anguished ecstasy. Millennia later, modern refinements of this Talisman also find their way into kink subcultures, pornography, human trafficking rings, and the sex-work trade. Kidnapped victims often feel the lash as well, their rapturous torment captured on video and marketed on the internet. It's consensual, after all, or so the merchants

claim. Even the most ferocious, bloody beating seems to invoke euphoria and a boundless hunger for more.

Simple in employment, complex in effect, a Gallu's Lash can range from a dungeon-style flogger to a true instrument of torture and slow execution. Its leather strands and hide-wrapped handle respond to the psychic command of a person who knows how to use it best. More a sensual instrument than a weapon in the usual sense, a typical Gallu's Lash is a leather flogger that may or may not have studs, hooks, or barbs attached to it. In the hands of someone who knows how to use it, the Lash responds to the user's commands, striking only as hard as she wants it to strike. As the pain of that strike escalates into pleasure, the whip sets up a psychic bond between the wielder and the receiver of the welts. A subtle enchantment keeps the flogger from inflicting actual harm unless the wielder wishes it to do so, though if that's what she wants to do the harm can be extensive and often fatal.

The subject of her beating, meanwhile, craves more pain, more pleasure, more injury. By the time she finishes her work, he'll most likely be addicted to that pain and to the one who wields it. Although the Gallu's Lash *can* be used in a combat situation, it's most effective when employed as a toy in a negotiated BDSM scene. The lash's power, however, overrides safety, sanity, and consent, turning a play partner into a veritable slave who literally doesn't know what hit him, much less why he wants it to hit him again, and again, and again, past the point of human endurance and beyond.

As befits its demonic name and nature, this Talisman is a tool of intimate violation. Even a victim who thinks he's consenting to rough play has that choice beaten out of him by the darkest kind of magick.

System: Within the leather handle and strands of the whip, a series of related Effects control the material, psychological and energetic results of a whipping: Entropy 3 seeks out the victim's weak and sensitive spots; Forces 2 controls the physics of flow and impact, allowing the whip to inflict lesser or greater degree of damage, depending on the user's wishes; Life 3 allows the whip to inflict aggravated damage, or to heal the damage it inflicts; Mind 3 inspires a deepening spiral of pleasure in the person being hit, establishes an empathic bond between the victim and the sadist, and overcomes the victim's boundaries, self-preservation, better judgment, and sense of self. The psychic assault – and no matter what the victim may have initially agreed to, this is an act of rape — weaves a vicious addiction to tormented submission. What may have started as a game becomes degradation of the spirit. With each stroke, the victim learns to crave the lash and the person who commands it.

When a character strikes a living target with this Talisman, the Storyteller rolls the whip's Arete against difficulty 6, then adds one success and checks the *Base Damage or Duration chart*. She can choose to make that damage bashing, normal or aggravated, and may heal that damage the same way if she chooses to do so. To resist the Lash's psychological effects, the victim's player must

make a successful Willpower roll. The roll's difficulty begins at 5 but gains +1 for every turn of successful whipping.

A final, horrible option resides in the whip as well: If the wielder wants to add an extra kick to the proceedings, she can employ a Prime 3 Effect to flay the victim's life-force and transfer it to her instead. Each strike, then, transfers one point of Quintessence from the victim and gives it to the character holding the whip. The more she beats him, the stronger she becomes. This awful refinement allows the wielder to literally whip her victim's life away.

Used simply as a weapon, the Gallu's Lash inflicts aggravated damage with an extra success added due to the Forces 2 Effect. If the defender's wearing armor or other protective gear, the Forces and Entropy Effect allow the whip wielder to strike around them, depriving the defender of their protection; if the armor covers his entire body, that same Effect lets the attacker hit the weakest and most vulnerable spots anyway. A successful attack roll can also Disarm or Grapple a character (as per the combat maneuvers of that name, Mage 20, pp. 420-421). Meanwhile, a hostile opponent on the receiving end of that damage needs a successful Willpower roll (difficulty 7) to resist the psychological effects of the whipping; if he fails, he begins to enjoy it; if he botches, he stops fighting his attacker and submits to her mastery.

Although sensitive perceptions can spot a Malignant flavor of Resonance in the whip, the Lash and its effects appear completely natural, and thus coincidental, pretty much anywhere.

#### Gallu's Lash

Weapon	Difficulty	Damage/Type
Barbed Cat	6	Strength / 1 *

\*When used normally, without magick. For magickal damage, roll Arete against difficulty 6, add one success, then consult Base Damage or Duration chart. Successful strikes also bypass armor protection and inflict psychological trauma as well. Failed Arete rolls inflict the usual non-magickal damage. Concealment is J.

### •••• Portable Hellgate (Device)

Enlightenment 6, Quintessence 30, Background Cost 12 pts.

For those hectic times when you need to summon a hell-beast but simply don't have the time and resources to go through the whole process of setting the space, chanting out the proper rites, etc., certain Fallen technomantic wizards have crafted a risky but convenient alternative: the Hellgate. Now, with a few incantations and the right deals made beforehand, the Nephandus on the go can open cross-dimensional portals and call upon immediate assistance. Oh, sure — the Gate's not guaranteed to work well all the time, and the summoned entity can be a bit... cranky when it arrives. Still, there's a certain satisfaction inherent in one's ability to bring infernal creatures into the material world, if only for a short time. Just don't hit the wrong button or step too close to the gate while it's open, because such doors work both ways.

System: The powerful Effect behind this uncanny treasure involves Correspondence 4 (to reach the distant quarry), Spirit 4 (to open a passage between the creature's home realm and the location of the Hellgate), Mind 4 (to create a cooperative bond between the summoner and the summoned), and Prime 2 (to power the whole thing). Additional Matter 3 and Correspondence 3 Effects are used while manufacturing the Hellgate, allowing a bulky, heavy, complex piece of arcane machinery to break down into a light, portable, easy-to-assemble ritual hypertech configuration.

In place of the usual intricate summoning, bargaining and binding process (detailed in **How Do You** DO **That?** pp. 90-106), this infernal Device employs cross-dimensional hypertech wedded to good old-fashioned black magick. Assemble the pentacle, hook up the power, read the ritual, push the proper keystrokes, and stand back.

Constructed to fit into a suitcase, trunk, or large backpack, the Hellgate expands and fits together into a metal summoning pentacle, an external power supply, and a handheld computer pad loaded with summoning apps. Of course, the user must first establish "working relationships" with demonic entities by way of the traditional methods. (See "The Bargaining Process" in **How Do You DO That?** pp. 91-95.) Otherwise,

the gateway will open but the things which come through it will not be well-disposed toward the mortal who opened that gate. One the magus establishes those uncanny partnerships, however, he can call upon the bargain to request aid by way of the Hellgate. The arriving entity must be thanked upon arrival with some sort of living sacrifice; to Fallen demon callers, however, that's not a hard thing to arrange.

More often than not, the requested aid involves a lesser demonic creature—perhaps an Imp or Demonhound, detailed in Chapter Four. Powerful entities have better things to do than appear when some presumptuous mortal's contraption tells them to do so. Every so often, however, a Nephandus who's on especially good terms with some greater entity might receive an in-person response. That Fallen mage's enemies, at that point, would be in for a very bad time, especially if the entity's promised payment includes a few new souls.

Each activation of the Hellgate expends five points of from its Quintessence battery. For obvious reasons, this Device employs *extremely* vulgar technomagick. Paradox backlashes often involve someone coming through the gate and snatching up the mortal ballsy enough to use such a thing. As noted earlier, the Hellgate operates both ways, and the Realm on the other side of it is bound to be extremely unpleasant.



# Chapter Six: Your Friends and Neighbors

When it came to the dark fuckery of the human heart, there seemed to be no limit.

— Stephen King, "Big Driver"

"So, you're into that stuff too, huh?"

Walter Chamberlain's not a popular kid. Not at all. Too quiet. Too intense. Too black-looking and not black-enough-acting. And that's not even going near the queer part, the thing he hasn't said to anyone yet and isn't sure he ever will. It's not the sort of subject you raise with your dad, who's waiting for you to grow basketball legs or linebacker shoulders and has no time for a budding gay kid. Walter – not "Walt," oh hell no – spends too much time with books and not nearly enough time with girls. Not that kind of time, anyway. His friend Lindsay is cool, but Walter feels nothing but affection for her.

And so, when Greg Pierce, the hottest guy in English class, leans in toward Walter with a conspiratorial whisper, the understandable reaction is:

"What?"

Greg makes a slight nod toward Walter's backpack. "The Eye of the Hunter," he replies. "Good stuff, right?"

But it's hidden, not obvious. The backpack's closed. How does Greg know? "Um..." Not the best response. Walter feels his stomach drop at

the sight of Greg's brown eyes and the faint taste of his breath. The stir of fresh-shaved beard across the skin of his face. "Uh..." he starts again. "Kinda, yeah. I guess."

When you're outside, any key that looks like it might get you in seems like a lifeline to you. The book's advice feels pretty sketchy to Walter, but... well, he's outside and wants...

Wants.

Nothing he can afford to say.

"I read it last year," Greg offers as the sound of class seems to drop away. Greg's eyes feel like everything now. Everything Walter wants and doesn't dare to ask for. "Hey, if you want..." Greg glances away for a second and the room seems to fade. "After class, you busy!"

Um... That damn word again. Walter swallows it. "No," he says in a firmer voice. "No, I'm not. Why?"

"I think we've got some stuff in common," Greg replies. "And I know somewhere where we can talk in peace..."

### Familiar Faces in the Dark

They don't act alone, you know. Although the Fallen themselves are small in number, their influence encompasses the globe, and other worlds besides. They're seldom obvious in their atrocities, and while rival mages look for tentacles and claws, the

Fallen Ones are on the phone, in the office, and tapping away at keyboards in the dark.

The following chapter presents a faint glimpse behind the curtain of this horror show. A number of influential Nephandi

can be found in Chapter Three as well. For a wider view, see Mage 20 (pp. 228-230, plus Appendix I), The Book of Secrets (pp. 240-242), The Mage 20 Quickstart (pp. 42-45), and Gods & Monsters (as a whole).

The Spirit Charms referenced in character entries below can be found in Mage 20 (pp. 490-495) and Gods & Monsters (pp. 214-220), while the Special Advantage Traits are detailed in the latter book as well (see pp. 201-214).

### Cults, Cliques, and Corporations



Misery loves company, especially when the company in question enjoys making other people miserable. Throughout the world, in every country and culture where at least a handful of people have dedicated themselves the hurting other folks for fun, profit and power, you can find Fallen allies, pawns, servants and slaves. Some of those folks know exactly what they're doing. Quite a few do not, and a good deal of them have

figured out that something's distinctly strange about their benefactors, associates and big-ticket clients, but it's not like they're willing to rock the boat and risk letting a sweet deal slip away. Occasionally, those people *do* get second thoughts. It's not healthy to act on them, though, because prison, the streets, or the unemployment line are big improvements over what happens when a Fallen One feels an associate has been ungrateful for his patronage.

Many of the largest and most influential Nephandic organizations — the Pipers, the Gatekeepers, the Golden Bull, God's Hammer, and so forth — can be found in Mage 20 (referenced above), and The Book of Secrets (p. 242) presents an overview of the various kinds of influence the Eaters of the Weak exert over the Masses. There are many more out there, of course — hundreds, perhaps thousands more where these groups came from. Although the Fallen themselves are relatively few in number, their impact across the world runs far beyond anything mere numbers can suggest.

A handful of groups and people with Nephandic backing, connections, patronage, and occasional membership includes:

### A Better Sandal, Inc.

Need work? Hustling gigs? Trying to afford that outrageous rent your landlord stuck you with? Look no further! A Better Sandal, Inc., is always hiring, and they've got branches everywhere. Best of all, you don't need any special skills or college paperwork. Just a willingness to be a total asshole to people you're never going to meet anyway. What could possibly be wrong with that?

A lark which turned into a multi-billion-dollar business virtually overnight (with no small amount of help from governments, political action groups, and Fallen benefactors), A Better Sandal, Inc. employs people to spread dissent, undermine credibility, and hound whichever group or celebrity seems like a good target to harass today. There's no ideology or cause behind the group

— that's the genius of it. This corporation's only agenda involves taking a massive dump on humanity's face... and lots of people do that for free anyway, so getting paid is an extra perk of the job. The more you work, the more you earn! You can work from home as well, which makes this an excellent gig for folks trying to make too many ends meet. So long as the calls, posts, tweets, memes and messages get booked, and display a suitable degree of cruelty, the paychecks keep rolling in.

Founded in 2009 by three friends named Freddy McMurtry, Ellen Fairlane, and Ash Grant, A Better Sandal, Inc. originated as MyShitPost, a social-media dumping ground for folks pissed about politics, the media, the cratering economy, and life in general. Thanks to the computer savvy all three friends brought to the table, their posts and calls remained essentially untraceable. Ellen, in particular, displayed a talent for crafting bulletproof sock puppets — a vital skill given the group's dedication to pissing people off under someone else's name. Identity theft, Nigerian-prince-style scamming, debt-related harassment, political fuckery... it started as a way to blow off steam, but soon became a business renting its services out to collection houses and political action groups. Within two years, MyShitPost was fielding offers for tens of millions of dollars.

As befitting the nature of their endeavor, all three partners conspired to fuck each other over. As befits their silent partners, all three of them wound up scattered in little pieces at various corners of the world, and they took a very long time to die.

Under a new name and ownership, A Better Sandal, Inc. has branches on every continent, worked by local talent as a temporary gig. The fact that the name bears no resemblance to what the company does is, of course, intentional. Although the public face of A Better Sandal, Inc. is CEO Daniella Striver Hatendi, a Zimbabwean businesswoman who made a fortune off footwear technology, that person isn't real, and her business isn't either. Hatendi is an artificial lifeform designed by a Fallen Progenitor to appeal to a 21st-century marketplace. Her elaborate backstory was cobbled up to be a feel-good bootstraps story... a metaphor A Better Sandal, Inc. uses in their PR. Behind a field of screens too dense for professional investigators to pierce (lots have tried), A Better Sandal, Inc. is a Heralds of Basilisk corporation whose employees have nothing to do with that entity or meme. Instead, they're shitposters for hire, scandal mongers, freelance harassers, bot 'grammers and cause scammers, anonymous tippers, political malcontents, and devilish collectors with no mercy, no scruples, and no reason to stop what they're doing because they're paid well to keep on doing it.

A Better Sandal's efforts remain untraceable. The Heralds of Basilisk have seen to that. From behind sock puppets and bot accounts, the flood continues — every hour, every day, on every continent on earth. Although the company gets paid big bucks by third parties who hire them to cause trouble all the way to the bank, the true purpose of the company is simple: to make folks miserable.

The Better Sandal name came from a joke about using a light foot to grind people's faces in the pavement. From behind an indefinite number of keyboards and cell phones, an indefinite number of people who have no idea what they're actually doing (and who really don't *care*, so long as they can make their rent and afford some beers when they finally get off work), A Better Sandal, Inc. tromps through the virtual world, making the real one a bit more hopeless every day.

### Keyboard Commando

Background: Some folks like to work at a nice, safe distance. Fortunately for them (and unfortunately for the folks they choose to work against), the internet provides a previously impossible arsenal of weapons: hacking, doxing, swatting, cyber-bullying, social-media gang-beatings, character-assassination videos, viruses and malware, DOS attacks, bots, tweetstorms... the list grows longer every year, and the keyboard commando loves them all. Whether he's an MRA trog mobilizing like-minded fellows to drive offending women off social media, a social justice berserker for whom everyone's the enemy and anything is acceptable collateral damage, a crowdfund-scammer whipping up hard-luck stories, a botski-dumper spamming comments sections with inflammatory sewage, a challenge-video prankster or a teen-taunter terrorist... this list apparently grows longer every day, with no end in sight. Technology excels at helping people be shitty toward one another, and if it seems like the Fallen dominate the new millennium internet, that's because they often do.

Why do these people, willingly or otherwise, perpetrate that nihilist agenda? Real conviction, sometimes - a feeling that wrong things can be, and must be, made right from behind a keyboard via the proverbial "any means necessary." Deep-seated rage, personal or otherwise, and a feeling of disgust with the world in general. Boredom, quite often, and a search for meaning in a banal world. Addiction to the thrill of beating someone into surrender with nothing more than a keyboard and the will to use it ruthlessly. Revenge for real or imagined slights. More often than not, though, it's just boredom – for the lolz, because they can, because it's so easy to lose sight of the human beings on the other side of the screen...and really who gives a fuck about those people anyway? Whatever the motivation might be, and whatever end of the political spectrum he happens to occupy, the keyboard commando makes an excellent shock trooper for the Ascension War. In the battle for reality, after all, few fighters are more effective than people who can mangle hope without even leaving their homes.

Best of all, this Fallen ally rarely understands what he's doing. For him, it's all just words — and speech, like information, wants to be free.

If there's a common thread between keyboard commandos, it's that they'd rather punch keys at home than risk getting punched in the face in the streets. These folks tend to be affluent enough to afford a computer, internet access, high-speed connectivity, and the luxury of sitting on their asses at home long enough to cause trouble online. Those factors tend to be more common in industrialized regions than in rural ones, although by the third decade of the 21st century internet access is damned near universal in most parts of the world. As a rule, the keyboard commando is either looking for a cause or trying to advance a cause he already has. Fallen manipulators, particularly among the HOBs, excel at finding such people and then aiming them at the Nephandic target of choice. Quite often, though, a Fallen mage doesn't even need to bother looking for such allies. They do her job for her, perhaps with a nudge here and there but otherwise being left to their own devices. As with so many other Nephandic allies, the human urge to be cruel does the Fallens' work for them.

**Image:** Despite popular impressions about neckbeards, SJWs, dungeon trolls, and other social rejects, a keyboard commando can be anyone with internet access and the desire to hurt people with it.

Roleplaying Notes: The commando's primary motivation involves a grudge of some kind and the ability to smack someone — anyone — about the head for that real or imaginary slight. There might be other motivations involved as well: financial hardship or greed, sexual frustration, abuse trauma, goading from outside parties, etc. In the case of Nephandic allies and pawns, those motivations include a driving urge to hurt people...and the more pain you can cause this way, the better!

Suggested Traits: Computer and Technology are obvious requirements for every commando. Expression or Art (Writing) is helpful but not necessary. Busy or unusually knowledgeable keyboard commandos have various Knowledges connected to their areas of expertise, and the ones who employ advanced virtual weaponry (hacking, swatting, doxing, and so forth) generally have a dot or two in the appropriate Traits. As is obvious from the Comments section of any social-media site, a keyboard commando doesn't necessarily have to be any good at what he does - just persistent enough to be an almighty pain in the ass. The folks who deal out real damage, though, have connections (see the Socially Networked and Subculture Insider Merits and the Networking Skill) and appropriate forms of knowledge (Conspiracy Theory, Finance, Politics, Vice, etc.). Awakened commandos specialize in the Data Sphere, and often Mind, Forces, and Entropy, as well. Nephandic commandos who can work in the Digital Web or employ technomagick are especially destructive, and often rally dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of allies among the Masses when they select a target and move against her.

# Beastwarez and Other Outlaw Fashion Lines

Nephandic clothing sounds absurd...which is what makes companies like Beastwarez, Maaner, Enfurnin, and AtroCity so

insidious. Riding high on the internet boutique counter-couture wave, these clothing brands offer sleek designs, vivid colors, vague-yet-subversive iconography, and dazzling models posed in urban or wilderness ruins, like survivors at the end of the world. The clothes themselves are fairly innocuous...until you reach the high-end bespoke stuff, anyway. The social messaging attached to those fashions and the people who favor them, though, is anything but innocent.

Beastwarez and the brands encourage a "me first, you last" mentality, rooted in the growing tribalism of internet culture and attached to deeply toxic subcultures among the Masses. Maaner — an athleticwear brand with MMA appeal — employs an all-white model base and favors covert neo-Nazi signaling; Beastwarez presents a more visually diverse model range, but every one of them poses in fashionable rags amidst deep woodlands, wearing a feral attitude of sneering contempt. Enfurnin clothing is blatantly Satanic, with Goetic symbols and demonic figures worked into their designs. AtroCity smashes the *Road Warrior* aesthetic face first into death metal, crafting a line of gory wreck wear for blood-caked models of psychopathic appearance. For folks craving shock appeal, these brands seem irresistible. The subtle enchantments worked into their websites take that appeal even further than one might realize at first glance.

For people on the inside track, these clothes are more than fashion statements. Beastwearz is popular among dark pagans of an especially militant kind — church-burners, anti-civilizationists, eco-terrorists whose initiations include live sacrifice and whose rites feature traditions like the blood of wild stags and unbaptized infants. Maaner has a worldwide fascist base, while Enfurnin appeals to serious devotees of the Blackest Arts. Though also popular with the Burning Man crowd, AtroCity's apocalyptic glamor is big with the "burn it all down and piss on the ashes" crowd. Each company has an Awakened Caul-surfer or three on the staff, and the marketing and modeling teams are straight-up cultists for the Nephandic cause.

All four clothing manufacturers originated within the past 10 years, with Maaner being the first and Enfurnin being the most recent. All four have a network behind the scenes, linked to a Fallen cell called the *Crimson Thread*. Only the founders of each group belong to that cell, with each one of them maintaining a separate cult of lower-ranking Nephandi and the dregvati who serve them.

AtroCity has a base outside Reno, Nevada, which puts them close to the action around the Burning Man festival where the group originated; though they cannot sell their goods at that ostensibly merchant-free festival, AtroCity Camp is a popular destination with a rep for giving away lots of cool stuff while hosting some of the most infamous debaucheries on the Playa. Leader Godiva Martin Warstrike (yes, that's her legal name these days) keeps a harem of pretty toys to play with, but she works her staff with the fierceness of a Nevada dust storm and leaves the grunt labor to a warehouse full of captive Central American immigrants.

Maaner is located in Wurzburg, Germany, with offices located in a cellar system that was lost to official records after the bombing

of that city during WWII. Founder Chlothar Haas claims it once sheltered a pack of Himmler's Operation Werwolf operatives – a pack he claims his grandfather led. Whether or not either claim is true, the offices and manufacturing floor are ripe with Third Reich imagery – a decorating choice that, under German law, is highly illegal. Naturally, this makes the company a magnet for disaffected Nordic youth, who work for below-standard wages and grueling long hours in an effort to prove their continued devotion to the cause and to score lots of goodies that Maaner gives away free to its employees and encourages them to sell at a markup through the European festival scene. Haas and his two Awakened associates, Reinhilde Vonwerden and Erich Strauss, impose strict, athletic discipline on their staff, and so all Maaner employees look like chiseled archetypes of Nordic supremacy... and, of course, act accordingly, regardless of their job within the shop. Even their web techs seem ready to bench press a warehouse, and the hardy image is a mainstay of their brand.

Enfurnin, the most visually occultish of the lot, is based in Egersund, Norway, with a small shop and office near the Church of Saint Mary. In a hidden room of the basement of that shop rests a stone altar dating back to prehistory. The darkish stains on that altar attest to its ancient purpose, and the firm's owner, designer, and prime model, Marit Lin Haugen, refreshes those stains whenever possible. Marit maintains the business almost singlehandedly; though she outsources the mass-produced designs to a sweatshop in Pakistan, crafts unique high-end pieces herself, and leaves the grunt maintenance of the shop, shipping, and technologies to a deafened and heavily scarred slave named Ulf.

Beastwarez is based in Saute Ste. Marie, Canada, though its sales offices, manufacturing, and warehouse are all located on the American side of the St. Mary's River for tax purposes. The nearby forests and national parks provide plenty of ritual space and lovely photographic opportunities for the 50 or so staffers who keep Beastwarez one of the hottest names in modern internet fashion. Comprised of the polyamorous triad of Cutter, Wren, and Isabelle, the group's Nephandic leadership nurtures a fashionably feral image with deep (sometimes bloody) roots in the city's dark pagan community. Other local pagan groups have learned to steer clear of what they often call "Cutter's Crew," partly because androgynous Cutter makes the most memorable impression of the three, partly because all three leaders share a penchant for cutting runes and occult designs into their skins, and partly because they've been known to use their knives and claws on other folks who get too close and presume too much. This, of course, just makes Beastwarez that much more popular among certain fringes of the North American pagan scene, who find that prissy "harm none" crap too tame for their liking.

For the most part, the clothing from all four brands, and their growing waves of imitators, possess no magickal properties. The iconography is vaguely though not overtly (aside from Infurnin) occult but is not otherwise crafted with metaphysical improvements.

Except, of course, for the custom work.

All four manufacturers offer "secret specialist attire" for clients who can pay upwards of \$1000 an item. These goods range from Matter-reinforced clothing (like the Bulletproof Hoodie featured in Mage 20, pp. 654-655) to charm-inducing sportswear and MMA athletic garb that provides unnerving social enhancements, feather-light armor, and perhaps a little extra kick to the wearer's hand-to-hand attacks. Like the Falconi and Associates business attire detailed after the Bulletproof Hoodie entry, these custom-made garments rarely tear, never shrink, and wipe clean even after those messy rituals and late-night killing sprees. Anyone who wears such garments reduce their difficulties by -2 when attempting to intimidate or seduce someone. The real bonus of this clothing, though, isn't magickal at all: folks within the Nephandic ranks give a slight degree of status to people wearing the custom-made garb, and malcontents affiliated with the subcultures above consider those who wear clothing from these four manufacturers to be "one of our own" even if neither party has ever heard of "Nephandi" at all.

The true magick these clothing brands pursue, however, is not the brute magick of fists and armor. It's the greater, slower, yet infinitely more effective magick of symbols and ideas. Each of the four brands is touting an impression of what a glamourous world would be like: chic, attractive, militant, usually white, and ready to dance through the embers of civilization when our dull society falls. By making that impression desirable — through sexy models in sexy clothing inferring a sexy sort of violence — these Nephandic clothing brands insinuate the ideal of a civilization overturned and handed over to those who deserve the future: strong, sexy, brutal, young, potentially deadly, and impressively fashionable. The hunger to be beautiful among the beautiful people exerts a subtle yet inexorable pull toward chaos and ruin in the name of looking good. Their fans aren't just buying clothing — they're buying into that idea.

#### **Shock Artiste**

Background: Art is truth, and truth is ugly. Therefore, certain artists excel at depicting the horrors of this world. Otto Dix, Greg Irons, Diamanda Galas... such artists shape life's ugliness into compelling works of art. If those impressions disturb you, that's not their problem — it's yours. And so, the Fallen embrace such artistry and the people who create it, both for the grotesque power such art commands and for the effect it has on the general public. After all, if unnerving truths strip away the façade of prettiness most people regard as "art," the resulting sense of unease works to Nephandic benefit.

Provocative media is the bread and butter of such people. Slogans, fashions, memes, and more, all designed to outrage the audience, shout out from the mainstream in order to be seen. Fallen artists and their protégées go further still, crafting art out of gross substances and appalling inspirations. That lacquered baby split in half down at the local gallery can't *really* be a baby, can it? That band doesn't *really* put subliminal violence triggers in their videos — that's just ridiculous! Okay, so that stand-up comedian spent half his performance making rape jokes...but

he spent the other half complaining about the GOP, so he's not *actually* a sexist, rape-culture creep, and those three women who got assaulted after his show had it coming anyway. Fallen artists can instill magickal spells into their work, while unAwakened artists might serve Nephandic purposes by creating division, discord, and despair. Either way, the audience may be far more influenced by that art than anyone realizes at the time.

That's not to say all artists who craft disturbing media are Fallen pawns or propagators, of course. Art does have a long history of presenting grotesquery because life itself is often grotesque. Especially in our media-saturated world, however, art becomes a perfect vehicle for strife. So, when that Evangelical conspiracy theorist goes off about the company that produces games which induce suicide and crime among the players, that person might not be entirely off base after all.

Image: Often playing up the popular image of the tormented artist, such people reveal in dark eccentricity and proclaim the necessity of "revealing the truth" in all its sickening splendor. Most of them can recite Art Theory 101 arguments to defend their creations, and they promote a dour persona as evidence of authenticity. Addictions to every imaginable form of excess are standard procedure for these mercurial creatives. After all, moderation is a crutch for unenlightened proles, while a true artist thrashes her way through life until the inevitable glorious flameout that renders her immortal.

**Roleplaying Notes:** You're just sharing the truth the way it really *is*, man!

Suggested Traits: While the Art Talent is helpful in such a vocation, it's not actually necessary. Expression tends to make a much bigger splash than actual creative ability. Macabre artists often pursue vocations that complement their thematic vision - morgue attendant, medical examiner, crime-scene photographer, slaughterhouse employee, and so forth – and have the associated skills as well. Obviously, a successful artist needs to know how to work with her preferred tools, and so Abilities like Crafts, Technology, Media, and so forth are common among working professional artists of all kinds. Awakened artists, meanwhile, often focus their magicks through practices like Chaos Magick, Craftwork, Crazy Wisdom, Domination, Gutter Magick, Maleficia, Reality Hacking, occasionally Weird Science, and the symbol-laden arcane disciplines of High Ritual Magick, Shamanism, Voudon, and Witchcraft. Artwork, of course, is a common instrument, with other instruments coming into play depending on the artist and her media of choice.

#### Club Maelstrom

The pavement trembles beneath your feet. The neon promises unspeakable delights. It's just a nightclub, true, but this one's different. Only the right people know about it, only the right people can get in, and only the right people ever leave once they've walked through its black-glass doors.

Inside, hazy air swirls and tiled floors shudder. The pounding beat works its way into your bones. Gorgeous people, ugly

people, packed crowds of carnal intensity squirm and mingle on the floors, wrapped around their drinks, posh furnishing, and often one another. The strobes seem to follow a Morse code of the damned, pulsating to a rhythm you can't quite get your head around. Bathed in the glaze of bright lights and dark attentions, you move toward the bar and catch sight of something more outré nearby. Beneath the music, you hear laughter, screams, and the kind of wet sounds that suggest leather, skin, and fluid meeting.

Do you check it out? Of course, you do.

Inside, the hallways wind in strange directions, up ramps, down stairs, corkscrewing up or down in ways that seem impossible given the dimensions of the outside space. Bridges and balconies reach out across the dance floor; mirrored mazes reflect parts of you no standard mirror ever showed. Curtains ripple over alcoves. Partitions block certain spots from view. The air seems to burn with colors and light. In the shadows, though, that light seems to flee until nothing is revealed at all.

Except the bodies. Always bodies.

Dancing. Posing. Licking. Fucking. Mountingeach other with unbearable hunger. Slapping each other in the face. Whipping bare skin, burning clothes, shoving hot coals under tongues and shoving pins through places best left undescribed. "Orgy" is too tame a word. Safety, sanity, and consent never even came through the door of this place, and if they had they'd have run screaming and never come back.

Fascinating, isn't it? The food's great and the drinks are cheap and every sin you ever wanted or imagined or turned your mind away from before your better self caught you contemplating it is here. There are no bystanders in Maelstrom, though. No

voyeurs allowed. If you're here, it's because you wanted to be here. Once here, you may not ever want, or be able, to leave.

Club Maelstrom has no single set location. It moves around every few nights, opening its doors in a new location in those parts of town where no smart person goes after sundown... or *before* it, really, for that matter. Invitations and advertisements appear spontaneously in message boxes or the mail, occasionally hand delivered by someone a potential guest would find irresistible. No matter how short a time the club exists in a location, it's always full of people. That's because many never leave, and so live their short but wild lives in thundering ecstasy. As long as those people serve the club — with their bodies, their passions, and eventually their lives.

Three people mind the door, check invitations, and welcome guests inside: a tall androgynous person who never speaks but communicates in sign, a taller woman with handsome features and a very deep voice, and an even taller man whose high voice and feminine features lead would-be trespassers to underestimate him badly. Their fashions and ethnicities change to suit the local culture, but they always stand up straight and speak the local language flawlessly. Anyone who tries to lay a hand on either of them winds up eating pavement through a mass of broken teeth. The bouncers' human guise is illusory, and their employers haven't left the club in centuries.

No one gets into Club Maelstrom without either an invitation, a referral, or a sigil marked in the center of their palm. That sigil betrays the club's true nature, but few guests recognize its significance, and those who do don't really care. This Labyrinth is carved into the Qlipha Gamaliel, "the Obscene Ones"; the sigil of that Qlipha is the marker for the club. The



The Book of the Fallen

nightclub portal was dreamed up somewhere between the fevered phantasms of libertines and the secluded revels of nighttime moors. Inquisition torture chambers fueled its construction as masturbating priests filled their prayers with visions of torn bodies and voracious demon-folk. Incubi and succubi shaped its corridors. Vampires spent fortunes to enjoy its sunless expanse. Club Maelstrom is a living thing, its pulsating interior fed by the vital energies of its guests. It sustains their need for food, drink, contact, and survival. They sustain it just by being there.

People do die in Maelstrom. All the time, in fact. Their bodies become furniture and sex toys and food and drink. Nothing is wasted. Maelstrom uses all the parts. For the most part, though, guests of Club Maelstrom can endure things that would turn mortal bodies into paste. It hurts, of course—it's supposed to hurt. But Club Maelstrom has a vested interest in keeping its guests alive, and moving, and screaming out for more.

You can leave Club Maelstrom, too. If you can find the door, and reach the door, then you can leave through that door, too, and — with very few exceptions — return any time you like.

The question, of course, is why would you ever want to leave?

#### Closet Sadist

Background: She seems innocuous enough. Perhaps a bit timid. Vanilla. Innocent. It's not until you get close enough to her for a while that you spot the gleam in her eye when she knows she's hurt you. Physical pain? Emotional pain? Doesn't matter. The closet sadist loves to hurt you, and the more ways you hurt, the more she enjoys it.

We're not talking about consensual kinks here. That stuff gets negotiated through mutual agreements. This is not. A closet sadist's an abuser to the bone, and the fact that you didn't sign up for it just makes the game a little sweeter for her. Oh, she'll tell you she didn't mean it. You'll believe her, too, for a while at least. Eventually, if you're not too far gone, you'll begin to realize that she gets off on it. The hurting. The drama. The apologies. It's intoxicating for her, this sense that pain connects you. It might feel intoxicating to you as well. After all, the word "toxic" is part of that sensation, and the emotional seesaw between injury and redemption can seem an awful lot like love.

She'll deny her appetites, of course. It was an *accident*, she swears. It'll never happen again...until it does. She'll probably turn it back on you, too. Your pain is *your* fault, not hers. If you try to leave, she'll reel you in. Leaving, it seems, would hurt you more. And so, the sadist weaves her garden of delights, savoring each twist of agony and conspiring — behind false innocence — to cause you even more.

In extreme cases, the sadist's not satisfied with little cuts here and there. Eventually, her compulsion swells to a potentially lethal form. You might find yourself tied one morning to the bed while she runs a razor through your softest parts, her skin flushed and sweaty with delight. A truly Fallen sadist kills for fun and takes her time doing so. If she's Awakened (which she might be), the tools she employs can be as blatant as a hammer or as understated

as a Life-based spell that locks your body into place while cramps and terror make you scream inside.

As usual, this isn't a gender-bound phenomenon. Male cruelty can be subtle as well as overt, and heterosexual binaries are not required for this sadist's games. What matters is the rush of energy, the feeling of control, the waves of dark ecstasy that pass between the sadist and her prey. For some, the pain merges into pleasure for everyone involved; to others, the mind games of control and manipulation are the key to feral joy. It's a tightrope walk; how far is *too* far to step? The sadist enjoys the dance, the struggle, the spark of life in an otherwise banal world.

Image: Like most seducers, closet sadists tend to be attractive enough to draw their prey in and then hang on to them after the pain begins. Fallen ones, in particular, are especially good at appearing as innocent and vulnerable as possible. That way, the victim winds up blaming himself for the problems; he should have been stronger, he could have been better, he's abusing her by accusing her of something so terrible, maybe if he really loves her, he'll... well, you know the drill. Covert sadists, regardless of their gender and approach, are extremely skilled manipulators. Emotional anguish, after all, is often as satisfying as — if not more satisfying than — physical excruciation.

Roleplaying Notes: Maybe you were abused yourself. It often happens. The pain you endured excited you to the point where more pain was the only thing that felt like anything at all. Or perhaps you're just a cold, brutal shit whose taste for another person's suffering is the best orgasm you could hope to achieve. Your reasons are your own. With regards to the subjects of your games, you portray yourself as innocent of all wrongdoing. The fault is theirs, not yours, and the more they try to leave you, the guiltier they'll feel.

Suggested Traits: Social Traits, obviously, dominate this template. Subterfuge is a must, with Expression, Intimidation, Medicine, possibly Art, and occasionally Torture for refinements of especially exquisite torment. A sadist who enjoys sharing pain both ways may have several dots in Empathy, too. Merits like Enchanting Feature or Innocent meet up with Flaws like Dark Triad and Extreme Kink. An Awakened sadist may use pain as an instrument for Energy-Work and Uncanny Influence (as per those sections in How Do You DO That?), working subtle rites with the passions and exertions of inflicted suffering.

# The Fraternal Order of the Shield

There is *law*, and there is *order*. Law is a slippery social construct ruled by lawyers, politicians, and activist groups. Order is an essential state for the existence of law. Without order, the law becomes a joke, subject to every manner of abuse and neglect. And so, order must come before law. An orderly foundation supports every other social contract. This is the creed of the Fraternal Order of the Shield, a covert international network within official law-enforcement agencies. Its purpose is the maintenance and protection of order at all costs. *Whose* order? Why, of course, their own.

The men within this brotherhood (in their eyes, female officers aren't real cops) view themselves as the shield for an orderly society. Dissidents threaten that society. Protesters threaten that order. Junkies, outlaws, homeless people and all their advocates...such people undermine the law and weaken their society. Obviously, they need to be corrected when possible, eliminated when need be, and taught their proper place in either case. The ugly truth of the matter is obvious to anyone who's walked a law-enforcement beat: people are slime. Calling us "animals" is an insult to the beasts. Human beings need a firm hand at their back or upside their heads. Every cop knows it, but few cops are dedicated enough to take that knowledge as far as it often needs to go. Those officers who are willing to break the law in service of order, however, find comfortable accommodations under the Shield.

Every member of the Shield is a cop of some kind, with no less than five years' experience in the field. By that time, of course, almost any modern cop has seen the worst sides of human existence. These cops know the score, and they realize that the good guys are losing. Shitty pay and marginal respect are not fit rewards for the men who hold society together. Law itself nurtures chaos, and so law must bow to order or else become meaningless. An officer who understands this ugly truth is prime material for recruitment by the Shield.

Likely candidates are watched from a distance; if they appear to accept the Shield's perspective, and display a steadfast solidarity to their fellow officers in the face of public pressure, such candidates may be secretly tested. Will a potential recruit favor order over law? Devotion to the badge over wishy-washy concepts like "justice" or "mercy"? Then he may be approached with an offer to join the most elite secret fellowship in law-enforcement history: the many faces of the Shield.

Originating in the mid-1800s as a secret brotherhood within Scotland Yard, the Shield extends its protection to every major industrial power on earth. Although the Shield's obvious face in North America is mostly white, invariably conservative, and exclusively masculine, every major nation has its own branch of the Shield as well. France's L'Ordre Fraternel des Enfants de Jeanne ("The Fraternal Order of Joan's Children") pursues the grand legacy of Vidocq in the name of Joan d'Arc. Japan's police department nurtures brutal order with its Daiyou Kyoku ("Alternate Division"), while Brazil's Comando Chico Bala ("John Doe Bullet Squad") enforces the bloodily ironic status quo of policial mata bandido ("cops kill bad guys") on behalf of cartels, landowners, and the gory-handed rich. These branches all correspond with one another, maintaining a tight network of interconnected law-enforcement agencies working on street, national, and international policing levels. Within these networks, officers crack down on protesters, curb stomp street-level crime, protect corporate interests, harass reform-minded organizations, suppress uppity minority populations, and cover one another's asses when judges, lawyers, and citizen activists complain.

"Police brutality" is a simple fact of life under the Shield. Its officers know all too well that certain people (that is, most people who cross paths with law-enforcement agencies) understand

only one thing: force, and lots of it. "Innocence" is a quaint notion at best, and the idea that criminals must be considered anything but guilty is a bad joke at society's expense. While the well-intentioned sissies in mainstream cop shops play by the rules, the Shield forgoes such nonsense in favor of direct and often permanent solutions. A lucky criminal might get a beating; more often, scum who defy the Shield wind up becoming the proverbial bodies no one will ever find. For some odd reason, Shield agencies have one or two people who are uncannily good at making evidence and people disappear for good. And if an officer should suffer a change of heart once he joins the Shield, he'll probably disappear as well.

As with every other dregvati group, the majority of the FOtS (known as "the Shield" to the officers involved) comprises normal, unAwakened human beings. Nearly all of them believe, to their bones, that they're doing the right — or, at least, the necessary — thing. A handful of Fallen mages and their associates man the upper ranks, and they circulate throughout the lower ones as well. As a rule, however, even the Awakened officers use obvious magick only as a last resort... and that magick is almost always of the tech-based variety, with plenty of Uncanny influence and occasional advanced Martial Arts techniques thrown in for good measure. (See those entries in How Do You DO That? pp. 114-136 and pp. 57-69)

#### Bad Cop

Background: Law enforcement demands a prodigious degree of trust. The people tasked with the world's hardest job in certain countries receive military-grade hardware, vast powers of discretion, and a veritable license to kill. Many of those people deserve it. Many others do not. Those latter folks take bribes, assault suspects, beat or kill folks for simply being the wrong person at the wrong time in the hands of the wrong cop, and generally make life difficult for their fellow officers while turning their societies into a nightmare of police brutality. Especially in the World of Darkness, these bad cops can be the worst people most folks will ever meet. And any Nephandus worth that name has at least a few of them on the payroll, whether or not those cops belong to the Shield.

Bad cops, Nephandic or otherwise, cause all kinds of havoc. The best of them take bribes, ignore crimes they're paid to overlook, employ violence as a first response (especially against whichever of "those people" the cop in question hates), cover up for the misdeeds of their clients and fellow officers, abuse prisoners in custody, imprison children for profit, demand sex from would-be arrestees, stomp protesters into the ground, hose folks down with pepper spray at point-blank range, pocket evidence and plant *false* evidence in order to frame innocent people, beat confessions out of whomever is unfortunate enough to be within a bad cop's orbit, harass people just because they can, and otherwise abuse the trust society gives them. The really *bad* cops are much, *much* worse: they're killers for hire with a badge and the ability to use it, perpetrators of rape and torture, blatant thieves and body dumpers whose idea of "law and order"

begins and ends with their discretion. The mere thought of these officers makes folks break out in a sweat whenever lights flash in their rearview mirror.

On a less-obvious level, bad cops destroy the system they're sworn to protect. Their abuses put fellow officers at risk, perpetrating an "us versus them" mindset that racks up corpses on both sides. Bent police erode the public trust, seed chaos, and traumatize the communities they're supposed to serve and protect. All too often, they wind up playing goon squad for ruthless corporations, enabling rich criminals, and making victims disappear. The swamps outside New Orleans are said to be full of bones from "people who won't be missed," and no one thinks twice if there's blood on an interrogation room floor. Even in the most prosperous environments, the arrest-and-incarceration system is intentionally dehumanizing. Cross a bad cop in a backwoods hellhole or a crime-wracked nation, and a strip search will be the least of your troubles.

In the sway or employment of Nephandi, the bad cop and his buddies can bust a mage's life to pieces without the use of paranormal Arts. Suspended driver's license? Taps on your phone? Search warrants, court dates, beatdowns, extortion... it's all in a night's work for the nightstick brigade. A bad cop with clout can stage a no-knock SWAT raid, pull you in for questioning for which you have no answers, destroy your life with a hard drive full of child porn he "just happened" to have found where no

such drive sat before. As any Black American can attest, a simple traffic stop can have fatal results if the car pulling you over has a bad cop behind the wheel.

Image: Bad cops come in all colors, genders, shapes, and sizes, wearing the uniform of their local constabulary unless they're detectives or plainclothes officers. Although there's truth behind the beer-bellied white bully with a Southern accent and a sheriff's badge, some of the worst cops imaginable seem like stand-up folks unless you're on their shit list. Any gender or ethnicity can turn a police uniform into a weapon of mass destruction, and every country has at least a few such officers. The extent of their abuses depends a lot on how much they feel they're able to get away with doing: a tightly-run metropolitan police force might have a handful of bad cops, while a community on the verge of collapse features gangs of corrupt officers who can, will, and do commit murder and get away clean.

Roleplaying Notes: The only law that matters here is you. No one but a fellow cop can understand the shit you see as part of the thin blue line, and so you've got no patience for crook huggers, lawyer slime, and assholes who refuse to respect the badge. Perhaps the job has hardened you, or maybe you took the job in order to pack your wallet and kick some ass. You might even have been an idealist once upon a long time ago. That side of you, now, is dead. The streets eat their own, and so you bite before you can be bitten again.



Chapter Six: Your Friends and Neighbors

Suggested Traits: Awakened Nephandi rarely take up the badge. It's too much work, and even lax cop-shops have too many hoops to jump through. Among the Fallen, though, bad cops are precious pawns, friends, and allies. To such associates, the Fallen confer the darkest blessings and sweetest sins at their command.

For game specifics, see the entries for Beat Cop, Professional Badass and Government Agent in Mage 20, pp. 620-623.

#### Moru Raven Press

A small but influential publisher of dark esoterica, Moru Raven Press — named for the Celtic goddess the Morrigan — was founded by three infernal esoterisists in 1998. Although none of the founders were Nephandi per se, editor Storm Grace Ferguson had a Fallen mentor who recognized her potential for media mayhem. Together with graphic designer Cheryl van Landerhaans and chief organizer Victor Grippe, the trio secured funding and distribution for an array of obscure occult texts in the public domain. Offering themselves as an alternative to white-lighter New Age publishers, Moru Raven Press soon made a name for themselves among Satanists, dark pagans, and seekers who preferred sinister paths to enlightenment.

Thanks to the influence of Ferguson's mentor and the genuine (if unAwakened) occult savvy of the founders and their authors, Moru Raven began publishing alternative history texts, anarchist political manifestos, biographies of infamous figures, and arcane rituals and reference materials... all of them surprisingly authentic. In a field rife with nonsense, MRP won a loyal readership and mainstream distribution. Victor Grippe died under questionable circumstances (and a FedEx truck) in 2003, leaving the entire operation to Ferguson and van Landerhaans, along with his house and several million dollars in previously hidden wealth. Investigations cleared the two partners of wrongdoing, and the windfall launched Moru Raven Press to an even greater profile. Ferguson had foreseen the rising influence of online shopping, and so by the time the mainstream American book trade began to decline, MRP had established a solid, growing presence in the online marketplace.

Never a stranger to controversy, Moru Raven publishes pagan pornography, forbidden grimoires, fearsome rituals from a host of ominous practices around the world, racial and gender supremacist texts, and a handful of "special collections" assembled by Ferguson's mentor, who publishes under a variety of names. These works — hand-bound, gorgeous, and costing hundreds of dollars apiece — contain subtle yet pervasive magickal spells in addition to authentically magickal lore. Meanwhile, the publisher's occult history texts name names and reveal secrets about the Traditions, Technocracy, and Crafts. Sure, *most* people assume that's all nonsense; some readers, though, know better, and wind up learning things a lot of mages would rather leave hidden.

Moru Raven Press occupies a strange, protected netherworld. Attempts to shut them down always seem to bounce off, either because of legal safeguards or paranormal security. Although Ferguson and van Landerhaans are essentially hedge wizards

(albeit rather capable ones), they have very powerful friends. For the most part, however, the company doesn't need much protection. Although it has over 100 titles available these days, few mages or magickal societies take it seriously. Surely, this silly little New Age publisher couldn't possibly be publishing anything real, could they? Despite the potent material between their covers, MRP remains underestimated and unmolested, nourished by Nephandic patrons, spreading harmful influence among the Masses, and shielded by that most effective tactic: No one who's dangerous really takes them seriously.

#### New Age Nitwit

Background: There's no such thing as good or evil! There are only positive energies and the moral propaganda that keeps us from attaining our blessed blissful selves! The misguided mystic knows for a fact that everything is innately good, while evil is just a state of mind that can be cleansed with enough sage, a forgiving attitude, and a nice big hug. Obviously, this person's not an actual Nephandus...unless, of course, she's the identity adopted by a Nephandus in order to lure suckers in. More often, this New Age nitwit is a dupe for the Fallen, maintaining cults and propagating nonsense for fun, profit, and darker agendas, too.

On the shadow side, this would-be guru could be a sexual predator, a profiteering plunderer of other people's sacred traditions, or simply a manipulative control freak with a profound lack of self-reflection. Whether or not she means to cause people harm, she manages to spread historical absurdities, whip up personal dramas, encourage toxic behaviors, and lure broken people into catastrophic relationships. The nitwit talks a good game, and she might even be sincere about it. The garbage she embraces, though, in the name of "enlightenment" is inaccurate at best and when you're messing around with folks in intimate ways, that sort of misinformation can prove harmful even with the best intents.

New Age nitwits seem to congregate around mages, hedge wizards, and other occult practitioners. As a rule, they know a little bit about a lot of esoteric topics but are wrong about almost everything they think they understand. The average New Age nitwit spews up jumbled terminology cached from the shelf of the local witchy bookstore, tossing elements of unrelated cultures into a seething stew of paranormal bullshit. But she's enlightened, so that's okay. After all, the only thing in life that really matters is a positive mindset and the willingness to forgive yourself for failing!

Beneath the superficial absurdities, this sort of person often harbors deep traumas and abusive pasts that she deals with through mystical beliefs. Away from the people she's trying to impress, this New Ager tends to be compassionate, if melancholy, endlessly tending wounds inside herself and striving to heal other folks as well. Her heart's usually in the right place (unless, of course, this persona is simply a shield for predatory inclinations), but she lacks true insight and the discipline to follow her beliefs into challenging places. And regardless of her best intentions, the New Age emphasis on "right thinking" tends to place the blame for misfortune on its victims; after all, "If you just maintained a more positive outlook, you'd understand that we make our own realities!"

As always, this nitwit's behavior isn't unique to any gender; the proverbial "Sensitive New Age Male" is almost as common as his female counterpart, and gender identities tend to become blurry in this subculture unless the practitioner feels really committed to that "masculine-feminine energy" thing... in which case, the New Ager can become quite dogmatic about rigid gender roles and behaviors.

At its darkest extent, this template's superficial positivity hides manipulative predation. Priestess So-and-so may be grooming young acolytes—occasionally underaged ones—for her bedroom, while Sacred Lover Lord Dudebro preys on damaged believers with his sex-positive messaging. Cloaked in glamourous rebellion, New Age parasites throw a pretty gloss over ugly behavior; if people call them out about it, they cry persecution, call in their flying monkeys, and accuse their accusers of being just like those damn Christian killjoys who've oppressed free spirits since the burning times.

Image: Vivacious and charismatic, our New Age nitwit boasts a yoga-toned body and flamboyant wardrobe. She probably uses an exotic name plucked from her mythology of choice, and peppers conversations with references to Tantra, Wicca, and "Native American shamanism." A slick gloss of hippie-speak coats everything she says, and she tends to have issues about respecting personal space. She's fun — perhaps intoxicating — to be around, especially for people who've been soul-hurt by life. Every so often, though, flashes of passive-aggressive nastiness

shine through, particularly when she feels it's time to "speak her truth" at your expense.

Roleplaying Notes: You are spiritually enlightened, and morally superior to most of the people you encounter. It's been a hard road getting to this state of your existence, but you suffer such challenges gladly because you know you're working toward a higher cause. Reveal your commitment to metaphysical knowledge by dropping names and terminology at every opportunity. Be on the lookout for wounded souls and potential soulmates. Such people may follow you through several incarnations...or at least make this one more fun.

Suggested Traits: The Subculture Devotees template from Gods & Monsters provides an excellent base for the New Age nitwit, although many such characters aren't nearly as skillful as a hardcore Devotee. Two or three dots in Occult are essential, possibly enhanced by a dot or two in certain Esoterica if the character really knows her stuff. Despite her annoying undertone, this sort of person tends to have strong Social Attributes and Abilities, most notably Expression and Seduction. With or without Nephandic influence, this character feels drawn to mages and probably hangs around with an Awakened soul or two. This template is sort of a default companion for pagan and Ecstatic mages, Fallen or otherwise; despite her faults, she can be legitimately helpful and endearing company... which, especially for mages, can make a predatory sort truly dangerous.

# Earthly Servitors and Malign Entities



From dark streets to Goetic hells, the Fallen call upon a wide variety of allies and servitors. A handful of common entities includes:

# Black Wind: III Winds from Beyond

Called into being from the depths of a hell realm, the spirits known as black winds comprise a cyclone of ghostly bodies, freezing gusts, and a sharp-edged grit of stones, bones, soil, and glass.

If addressed directly, certain ghosts in the column of ghastly clouds might slow the storm down, breathe out a few agonized words as an answer, and then scream back into the howling tempest. Any creature—spiritual or material—caught in the path of a black wind endures the spirit's Rage in lethal damage for every turn the wind scours its body. Within the storm, tormented spirits spin forever, caught by the restless gravity of their sins. Legends attribute the sin of lust to such winds…and the salacious remarks they sometimes moan into a listener's ears seem to bear those legends out. Certain Ecstatic mages, especially Fallen ones, have been known to summon black winds for revels of a disconcerting kind.

Unless one has been pulled to the mortal realm through magick, black winds exist only in certain Astral punishment

Realms. Only attacks from the Spirit Sphere affect the black wind, even if it has a short-lived materialized form, and although a significant amount of damage will scatter the storm temporarily (and, if it's been summoned to the material world, disperse it back to its infernal home), each black wind is essentially eternal.

Willpower 9, Rage 6, Gnosis 4, Essence 25

Charms: Appear, Corruption, Create Wind

#### Demonhound: Friend Gone Bad

Man's best friend has a nasty side. Beneath wet noses and wagging tails rests a pack-oriented predator who ran primal humans to ground during the Predatory Age. In time, dogs and humans domesticated one another. The spirit of that predatory dog, however, lives on the essence of the demonhound: an embodiment of canine terror in a compact, brutal form.

In the old days, infernal magi summoned these spirits through gruesome sacrifices and demonic invocations in which starving dogs were fed live children and then were butchered in turn to become vessels for demonic entities. Those old rituals still work, of course, and certain Nephandi kick it old school where such creatures are concerned.

More often in the modern era, though, dogs are simply raised from puppyhood through agonizing cruelties — the kind

dog-fighting specialists inflict in order to create canine berserkers with no demonic influence to speak of. Those dogs get branded, beaten, starved, shocked, tortured with fire, surgically altered, and forced into flank-ripping combat with one another until only the strongest, meanest dogs remain.

Dog fighters often tattoo or brand their dogs with arcane, intimidating designs — some mystically significant, most drawn from popular culture or a warped imagination. Fangs and claws are sharpened; ears are cut, genitals clipped or removed, subcutaneous spikes and blades occasionally embedded in the flesh of a dog and then covered over with fur so as to disguise their purpose. The dogs are kept in constant states of unrelenting pain in order to "toughen 'em up a bit" and inspire that fighting spirit.

And that's just the stuff *normal* dog-fight breeders do to their animals. The paranormal rituals come next.

Once a dog has survived enough damage to work that proverbial Nietzschean black magic, a Fallen breeder carves Goetic designs or dark shamanic runes into the dog's flesh. Special powders and ointments get rubbed into the wounds, and the dog is locked in an iron cage surrounded by sigils and protective ritual wards. A spirit of the primordial Hunter Hound is summoned into the cage and then locked into the mortal dog's skin by way of the designs. The resulting demonhound, once freed from his cage, is stronger, tougher, and a hell of a lot more vicious than even the most brutally abused fighting dog — loyal to his master unless the abuse continues, at which point the hound may turn on "master" and show him what pain really is.

Certain demonhounds manifest naturally, without such rituals, often at the bidding of some inhuman master. And similar, self-willed monsters — often larger and more dangerous than traditional demonhounds — appear at crossroads, in deep wilderness, and in areas of urban decay. These "greater hounds" personify the rage of Nature and fears of man: the uncanny war dog, the police dog with a taste for human meat, the primordial hunter of men, and the slave-catcher hound cultivated in the American South and other cultures to track, punish, and often kill people who had the gall to escape their captors.

**Attributes:** Strength 4 (5), Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Charisma 1, Manipulation 4, Appearance 1, Perception 5, Intelligence 2, Wits 3 (Traits in parenthesis represent greater demonhounds.)

**Abilities:** Alertness 4, Athletics 3, Awareness 1 (4), Brawl 3 (4), Enigmas 2, Intimidation 3 (5), Stealth 3, Occult 2 (3)

Willpower: 4

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -3, (-3) -5, Incapacitated **Armor Rating:** 1 (5 soak dice, 6 total)

**Powers:** Bite for six (seven) dice, claw for five (six) dice (both lethal); Claws, Fangs, or Horns 5; Acute Senses (Merit) 3 Greater demonhounds can also have one or more of the following Special Advantages: Bioluminescence; Bond-Sharing; Cause Insanity, three dice; Hazardous Breath for four dice, aggravated; Rapid Healing; Razorskin; Soul-Sense or Death- Sense; Spirit Vision; Spirit Travel (10 pts.)

Countermagick: 0 (2 dice of innate countermagick)

Image: Typically appearing as a medium-to-large-sized dog of intimidating breed (German Shepherd, Doberman, Pit Bull, Mastiff, Ridgeback, Great Dane, etc.), a demonhound seethes with infernal essence and the killer urge. Although their hides and fur tend toward darker colors, some demonhounds are bonewhite, crimson, uncanny blue, or other disconcerting shades. Glowing eyes and teeth are not at all uncommon, especially when you're facing a greater demonhound. The greater varieties may also glow with hellish luminescence, breathe gouts of flame, radiate guts-loosening terror, bristle with blade-sharp fur, or walk in and out of the Penumbra with ease.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Stripped of all the kindness that forged bonds between humankind and you, the only loyalty you feel now is to your own hungers, a greater master and your pack, and the urge to glut yourself on the meat of shrieking prey... preferably after an entertaining chase.

#### Fomori: Mutations of Inner Damnation

Infested with malign spirits, the walking fetishes known to werewolves as *fomori* manifest the darkest elements of their shadows through revolting physical mutations. Such people make themselves homes for spiritual corrupters who turn their lives into walking nightmares, although the human host might not intentionally toss out the welcome mat to such possession, the rotting parts of their souls allow those spirits to enter, feed, and grow.

Usually but not exclusively associated with Malfean Nephandi, fomori occupy the lowest ranks of cannon fodder. Their inhuman powers make them more than merely human, but those dark blessings also destroy them from the inside out. A given fomor might be strong, but her strength bends her body in grotesque malformations; another might spit acid – but would you want acid coming out of your mouth all the time? These mutations reflect the corruptions that person had before the spirits came along: That twisted, strong fomor might have been an especially vain workout junkie, while Mr. Acid Bath never met a conversation he couldn't poison with his words alone. Shamanic mages call these spirits Banes, and they consider these creatures to be manifestations of humanity's plague on the living earth. Other legends associate modern formori with their counterparts in ancient Celtic myth: savage primordial giants, cursed by the gods with deformities because of their overwhelming pride. If such associations are true, then fomori are collaborators in their own damnation, not innocent victims dragged into hell.

It is hellish, really — a fomor's existence. Even those with subtle malformations live shortened, painful lives and generally meet a gory demise at the end of a shapechanger's claws. Bane possession is spiritual rape, too, and it mutilates the body and mind as well as the soul. From certain perspectives, fomori are pitiable victims of forces greater than their flawed humanity could resist. Some mages try to save them from this condition, but while a sufficiently advanced mage can try to expel the spiritual housemate (see "Exorcism" in **How Do You** DO **That?** pp. 125-126),

many fomori either don't feel worthy of salvation or else aren't interested in becoming "just plain folks" again.

Fomori assume a breathtaking range of paranormal freakishness. No two are exactly alike, because although certain "breeds" of fomori share similar mutations, much of the spiritual corruption is rooted in the human host. People with anger issues develop poisons and boiling rage, violent people become misshapen brutes, and seducers and betrayers have those talents enhanced and exaggerated to gross proportions. The essence of mutation originates within the spirit, but that essence merely exaggerates whatever was there when the infection began.

Although formori seem more drawn to the elemental pollution governed by the archetypal entity werewolves call the Wyrm, Nephandi – especially ones of the Malfean persuasion - create and employ these tormented monsters are servitors as well. Potential fomori get kidnapped off the street, taken from homeless encampments, recruited from boardrooms, drafted from athletic teams, seduced within club culture, or otherwise scouted and secured from places where relatively capable people possess enough internal wreckage to provide suitable purchase from a Bane. Some "draftees" are poisoned with tainted drinks, foods, sex, and other entertainments; others get tortured and violated until they become suitable vessels for spiritual corruption, while still others are simply offered a chance to "change your life..." perhaps, given the current popularity of comic-book movies and TV shows, a chance to receive superpowers. There's a catch, of course... but then, isn't there always? For people desperate, jaded, intoxicated, or just plain bored enough, the idea of change, any kind of change, sounds like an excellent deal.

In Mage terms, fomori are essentially constructs, specifically living Fetishes possessed by a spirit who then works its powers through the human host. Those powers, though beyond human capacity, are degenerative by nature; sooner if not later, a fomor either self-destructs, gets herself killed, or decays from the inside out from the spiritual cancer within. The auras of such creatures crackle with black lightning or pulse with think smears of oily corruption. Although Spirit-Sphere exorcisms might save such people, the odds are not good, the fight will be hard (15 successes necessary), and the broken person left behind will suffer for the rest of her precarious life. Fomori "stink of the Wyrm," and their presence among Nephandi is a dead giveaway; for that reason, the Fallen tend to mobilize their "pets" from a distance, often through channels of plausible deniability and plenty of room to escape when things go poorly. Essentially, fomori are cans of organic-spiritual nitroglycerine that Nephandi often let other parties carry until the moment comes to throw them at someone and then disappear.

Fomori employ a wide range of Abilities, depending on their prior life and current purpose. For quick-and-dirty templates, see the normal human templates in Appendix I of Mage 20, The Mage 20 Quickstart (pp. 42-44), and Gods & Monsters, Chapter One. Choose an appropriate template, and then add in some Special Advantages from Gods & Monsters, Chapter Five.



Chapter Six: Your Friends and Neighbors

Because their powers come from spiritual possession, not human magick, fomori are immune to Paradox. That said, they suffer from the Genetic Flaws detailed in Mage 20, pp. 648-651. The wilder a given fomor's powers are, the more Flaws she will possess; one to three subtle powers will demand two or three Flaws, while a grotesque abomination will have five or more. Most fomori have a Derangement as well, and possibly other Flaws, too.

**Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: (see above)

Willpower: 2-5

**Health Levels:** OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

**Armor Rating:** 0 or more, depending on Special Advantages and potential armor worn.

**Powers:** In addition to the usual attacks, defenses and combat maneuvers which would employed by normal human beings who perform the tasks assigned to the fomori, these wretched spirit-husks can have one to four Special Advantages that suit their form of corruption. Fresh or weaker fomori can have up to five points in these Advantages, while especially powerful monstrosities can have 20 or more.

#### Countermagick: 0

Image: At first glance, a subtle fomor may appear completely normal to mortal eyes; a look at that person's aura or spiritual nature, however, reveals the truth. The ones who aren't that subtle betray hints of oddness — uncanny skin, lambent eyes, strange hair, unnatural posture and movement, and so forth. The truly freakish ones bear gross travesties of a normal human shape: armored skin, needle-fanged teeth, multiple arms, limbs in weird places, and so forth. Quite a few can shift from apparently innocuous humanity into sanity-quaking monstrosity within a second or two, gaping huge mouths, unhinging their jaws, sliding their skins back to reveal spike-ridged bones, and producing other horrific deformations into something only remotely human.

**Roleplaying Notes:** You've become a reflection of everything you once feared. Now, though, you have power — *true* power, the kind you never thought you'd get. Use it. Enjoy it. Your life's a horror movie now, so make it a good one before your final credits roll.

#### Imp: Your Little Friend

There's always someone beneath you. Smaller. Weaker. Sullen in your shadow. What happens when that person...or, in this case, that demon...has a chance to turn the tables? That's when you'll learn what it is to grovel under the power of someone else. For imps, who are in most regards the lowest of the low in demonic company, the chance to vent their eternal frustrations upon mortals is delicious revenge.

Legends speak of imps springing from Lucifer's tears as he wept in the exile from heaven. Or coalescing from Lilith's birth blood as she howled in motherhood, larger demons springing

full-formed from her womb. Some call them the bitter spirits of budding trees who never lived to grow tall, or tiny goblins who allied themselves with the forces of hell. Regardless of their source — and an imp will tell you whatever story suits his fancy at the time—imps have a long tradition as tiny servitors, forever dwarfed by their mighty kin and the mortal wizards who dared command the hosts of hell. It's no wonder, then, that most imps are crafty, hateful little beings who get a perverse kick out of bringing down creatures taller and strong than themselves.

In the internet age, imps enjoy kinship with mortals who feel the way they do: oppressed. Beat down. Vindictive. No one's quite sure when the first human dungeon troll forged a friendship with an imp, but since that time half-serious summoning rituals have made their way across the darker corridors of social media. Surprise, some of those rituals actually work. By the second decade of the 21st century, certain lonesome netheads enjoy friendships with actual imps. And because imps love fucking shit up, folks who cross said netheads sometimes find themselves besieged by tiny demons whose existence seems impossible and yet oddly fitting in our present age.

In order to fit in even better, imps can assume the forms of mortal animals. Cats, rats, pigs, goats, dogs, serpents, roosters, spiders... the traditional forms include small animals associated in folklore with sinister errands and sinful aspects. The modern world, though, is more flexible, and so although an imp's friend might have a "pet tarantula" that's a bit more than it might seem to be, the imp in question might just as easily become a raven, an iguana, or a macaw; the little demon can assume whatever small-yet-capable form it likes. Stuffed animals and action figures have become popular new forms among the impish elite, with particularly brash little demons manifesting as malevolent children or diminutive duplicates of their mortal hosts..

Throughout the Mythic Ages, imps were perhaps best known for their role as familiars among the ranks of witches and wizards. In that role, they'll still serve when need be—it is, after all, traditional. This egalitarian age, however, encourages imps to become literal free spirits, companions and perhaps even masters of mortals who lack the old methods of command and control. And so, although you'll still find imps darting to and fro around a mage's sanctuary, an imp's more likely to be watching porn or playing video games alongside his unAwakened buddy. After millennia of insults and servitude, these tiny demons enjoy whatever liberties they can grab.

While full-fledged Nephandi rarely use imps for anything other than household tasks (which they often do poorly on purpose), errands, messages, and minor irritations, the authentic online imp-summoning rituals tend to be their work. When you're trying to literally bring hell to earth, and disrupt the façade of non-magickal reality, helping internet randos summon up their own personal demons is a pretty decent tactic. As for the imps, they haven't had this much fun in ages. New victims, new pranks, and a chance to make actual... well, maybe "friends" is too strong a word for the bonds between impish demonkin and their bitter mortal counterparts, but misery loves company, and both imps and dungeon trolls often enjoy making other people miserable.

**Attributes:** Strength 2-4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2-4, Charisma 5, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 5

**Abilities:** Academics 3, Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Empathy 3, Enigmas 5, Esoterica (Demonology) 4, Cosmology 3, Investigation 2, Occult 4, Stealth 6

Willpower: 5

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -2, -3, -5, Incapacitated **Armor Rating:** 3 (five to eight soak dice, total)

**Powers:** Bite for three-to-five dice, claw for four-to-six dice (both lethal)

**Special Advantages:** Bond-Sharing; Claws, Fangs, or Horns 5; Human Speech; Information Fount; Nightsight; Paradox Nullification (3 pts.); Read and Write; Shapechanger (8 pts.); Spirit Vision; Spirit Travel (15 pts.); Wings (3 pts.)

**Charms:** Airt Sense, Appear, Armor (factored in above), Blighted Touch, Corruption, Create Wind, Healing, Materialize, Mind Speech, Reform, Soul Reading, Tracking

Rage: 5 Gnosis: 5 Essence: 50

Countermagick: 0

Image: One or two feet tall, imps generally favor the traditional demonic look: horns, tusks, exaggerated facial features, small and often bat-like wings, huge noses, clawed hands and feet, lashing tails, and a sullen, crafty disposition. Their skin tends to be very bright or very dark colors, and their voices typically grate or cackle when they deign to speak at all. Odors of brimstone or carrion often accompany an imp's presence.

**Roleplaying Notes:** You're not really *bad* or anything. You just enjoy balancing the scales in an unjust world by using the talents Satan gave you in ways that bring a smile to his face... or, at the very least, to your own.

#### Raamas Ka: Steeds of the Abyss

The heart of the Void forges vast obscenities. Among them, few that have been seen by mortal eyes can match the creatures known as *Raamas Ka*: steeds of the Abyss and organic war machines of the most powerful Fallen mages. Composed of pandimensional matter fused with the essence of eternity, these abominations exist, for the most part, out beyond the Horizon. For high-intensity assaults, however, Nephandic Masters can bring them through the barriers and send the creatures against earthly targets and rival Horizon Realms.

In battle, these hovering pools of demi-sentient goo batter their targets with boneless pseudopods that can reach 100 feet or more in length. Upon contact, the creature's skin scalds and dissolves all organic matter it decides to harm. Because Nephandic shock troops often ride these creatures — wrapped in tentacles or straddling them like grotesque mounts—the acidic feature appears to be within a Raamas Ka's control. Of course, Raamas Ka have

been known to melt their own riders, too—the Nephandic handlers often laughing in glee as their skin and organs get seared, melted, and absorbed into the flesh of the creatures they ride. As befits a Nephandic pet, Raamas Ka are dangerous to everything in sight.

Though clearly intelligent in some vestigial way, Raamas Ka appear to think on a level few humans could hope to understand. It's been said that only those mortals who have passed through the Cauls can understand them... a rumor which, if true, suggests Qlipothic origins for these abyssal entities. Mages who've tried communing with a Raamas Ka telepathically or through empathic bonds have had their minds pulped by torrential horrors—psychic catastrophes which inflict physical damage (as per the **Psychic Shatter** Effect described in **How Do You DO That?** p. 122), raging dementia (as per "Things Man Was Not Meant to Know," **Mage 20**, p. 407), and often both. People burnt by such contact often burst into black flames, sometimes singing peals of gibberish as each element of them is consumed.

Disturbing music is a signature of these entities. Although outer space supposedly remains soundless, Ethernauts and Void Engineers have recorded eldritch choruses of Raamas Ka echoing through that infinite abyss. When attacking, the creatures mewl like mad infants and screech unnerving waves of sound. Such cacophonies resonate across many different spectrums—psychic as well as physical. The few survivors who've tried to analyze Raamas Ka war songs claim it's the music of the Void itself.

Raamas Ka clearly span dimensions outside of human experience. Physical force has no impact on them whatsoever. Only magick can harm these entities... and even then, their resistance to magick remains strong. Only the Mind Sphere or a combination of Entropy and Prime damage can get past their intrinsic countermagick; all other Spheres — including Entropy or Prime used separately — have their Effects diminished to almost nothing. Being creatures entirely alien to Earth, Ramaas Ka are also subject to the *Unbelief* Flaw at its highest level; as detailed in **Gods & Monsters** (pp. 199-200), such affronts of the Consensus suffer immediate harm in the human world, though that effect diminished or disappears completely in Otherworldly Realms and the abyss beyond the Horizon.

**Attributes:** Strength 8, Dexterity 3, Stamina 9, Charisma 0, Manipulation 3, Appearance 0, Perception 6, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Cosmology 3, Stealth 3

Willpower: 8

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, -2, -2, -2, dispelled **Armor Rating:** 4 (13 soak dice, total)

**Powers:** Cause Insanity (six dice), Dissolving Touch (six dice of aggravated damage per turn of contact; may be used at range with a successful Dexterity + Brawl roll, difficulty 7; appears to be voluntary on the monster's part), Intangibility (10 pts.)

Countermagick: Four dice of innate countermagick

**Image:** Amorphous beings whose bodies slide constantly between jelly, flesh, and vapor, Raamas Ka resemble floating

clouds of malignant biomass. Tendrils and tentacles whip in and out of the gelatinous main body, which can compact into small, confined spaces or expand out into flying "pools" 50 feet long or larger. Every so often, eerie "eyes" seem to form and then disappear across the creature's expanse; for the most part, though, these creatures appear to be blind, yet sense their surroundings with uncanny acuity.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Your actions are unfathomable and motives inhuman. There should be no easily discernible motive to your chaotic behavior.

#### Sinfeeder: Agent of Moral Decay

It didn't seem like that bad an idea at the time, but then the inspiration blossomed, the idea deepened, and the next thing the guy knew he was assaulting a stranger and wondering how the hell he'd fallen so far from such an awful precipice. Meanwhile, the invisible fungus grew, and prospered, and sent out spores.

Those few who know about this entity refer to it as a *sinfeeder*: an astral mold seeded by dark temptations with sufficient psychic energy behind them. Nestled in the Penumbra (often by deliberate design), this fungus nurtures forbidden desires, and is nurtured in turn by the psychic energy of the person or people who act on them. Possibly a form of Tass bred at Nodes of human origins and exceedingly vile flavor, sinfeeders exist only to expand and propagate themselves. These spiritual entities do both by encouraging thoughts of destructive desires, enhancing those thoughts toward actions, and then feeding off the psychic energy unleashed when those desires are fulfilled.

Although they most often assume the form of silent, motionless moss or mold, sinfeeders occasionally manifest as buoyant clusters of floating orbs. Again, these orbs exist only in astral space, visible in the *Vidare Astral* perspective of the Penumbra and near-imperceptible to folks who see the primal or morbid views of the Penumbra instead. (See Mage 20, p. 82.) Whichever form they assume, sinfeeders are egregores—not natural manifestations or creatures of mortality but embodiments of human thought. Human consciousness creates them, moves them, nurtures them, and potentially destroys them.

As entities composed of pure psychic energy, sinfeeders remain exceedingly vulnerable to Mind-based **Psychic Blast** and **Psychic Shatter** assaults, as detailed in **How Do You DO That?** p. 122. Such attacks double their usual damage when directed against a sinfeeder; a blast which would normally remove 10 Essence from the entity removes 20 Essence instead. Thus, a psychic mage who understands what she's dealing with can clear out a sindeeder infestation in fairly short order. The trick involves knowing that the damn thing is there in the first place, understanding what it is, recognizing how it must be purged, and doing so before the sinfeeder corrupts its would-be assailant first.

Although they're essentially mindless, sinfeeders latch onto forbidden desires in people with strong psychic potential. Obviously, this doesn't apply to every repressed fantasy had by every person on Earth—sinfeeders would have overrun the world

long ago if that were the case. People with particularly strong personalities and especially virulent desires, though, nurture nearby sinfeeders if such entities exist nearby. Thus, pious clergymen find themselves stealing from the church or molesting the children in their care, charismatic celebrities wind up beating the crap out of significant others, and government officials dedicated to routing corruption get caught eyes-deep in corruption themselves. That said, these entities do not themselves create those desires. Although the **Corruption** Charm magnifies the urge to commit a crime, the roots of that sin lay in the person, not in the plant.

Speaking of plants: Sinfeeders tend to manifest in areas of extreme psychic significance, such as landmarks, battlefields, religious establishments, and so on. They grow when people act on their forbidden urges, and wither if those desires are set aside in favor of something better. Because Nephandi excel at spotting and exploiting such urges, they know what to look for if searching the Penumbra for sinfeeder fungus. In game terms, a mage (Fallen or otherwise) may use Perception + Awareness to spot a sinfeeder if that mage views the Penumbra through the Vidare Astral and knows what to look for there. The difficulty for spotting these entities depends on the size of the sinfeeder cluster: a small patch of fungus would be difficulty 9 or 10, while a massive patch or floating cloud of it would drop the difficulty to 6 or 7. A mage who notices the focus can astrally project into the Penumbra, collect the sinfeeder, then move it to a place of her choosing and "root" it in the new location by using Mind 2 (Influence Mood) to secure the psychic entity in its new home. (For the appropriate rule systems, see Mage 20, p. 474, p. 476, and pp. 519-520.) After that point, the fungus is on its own; a clever tempter, though, can get people worked up about something, and then let those emotions feed the fugus until it grows larger, stronger, and hungrier.

**Willpower** 1, **Rage** 2, **Gnosis** 1, **Essence** 5 (small patch or bubble) to 30 (vast patch, large floating spheres)

**Charms:** Absorb Psychic Essence (draws one Essence point per turn if a person within 15 feet or so acts out a forbidden urge), Corruption

#### Goetic Demons

Goetic sorcerers and other demonologists have a long and often stupid history of contacting the entities described in classical Western grimoires, particularly those of the Solomonic tradition. Oddly enough, these traditions and rituals never seem to call upon entities like Aicha Kandicha (a Moroccan water demon), Shuten Doji (a Japanese oni lord), or the dreaded Big Owl whose wings of fear obscure the sky (for details, see **Gods & Monsters**). Goetia taps into a culturally specific Abyss, and so although the number of demons involved in Goetic ritual is vast, the entities it contacts represent a famous yet limited sample of demonkind. With that in mind, these entities *are* essentially gods, constrained by certain rituals and laws yet impossible for mortals to defeat without aid, trickery, and all the knowledge a wizard can attain.

In game terms, Goetic demons are god-forms — too vast to be contained by Traits and *far* too powerful to be slain. Although their manifestations can appear, hold conversations, share sexual congress with mortal partners, and even suffer torment when bound with appropriately powerful magicks, these entities cannot truly be fought. Among the Awakened, only Archmages and the legendary Oracles have any sort of chance against such opponents. The magicks that bind and torture entities of this power rely upon ancient (some would say divine) principles, and they work only within the strict confines of appropriate pentacles and rites. Hence, there are no Traits to be found below. These entities are story elements, not mere antagonists.

That said, a Storyteller can use the following Traits to reflect an earthly manifestation of a Goetic entity who's been summoned and bound according to the proper rites. Such manifestations hardly count as even shadows when compared to the cosmic presence of the entity itself. Still, these earthly forms can give an arrogant conjurer a rather hard time.

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 8, Dexterity 8, Stamina 8, Charisma 8, Manipulation 8, Appearance 1-10, Perception 8, Intelligence 8, Wits 8

**Abilities:** Alertness 7, Awareness 10, Brawl 5, Cosmology 8, Enigmas 10, Intimidation 10, Melee 5, Seduction 7-10, Subterfuge 8, and other suitable Talents and Skills for the entity

in question, plus various Knowledges (Esoterica, Occult, Science, etc.) appropriate to the demon and its reputed specializations.

**Willpower:** 7-10 (depending upon the demon's rank in the infernal hierarchy)

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Dismissed

Armor Rating: 5 (13 soak dice, 5 total)

Powers: (Strength + Melee, 10 dice claws & bite (aggravated).

Countermagick: 5 dice of innate countermeasures

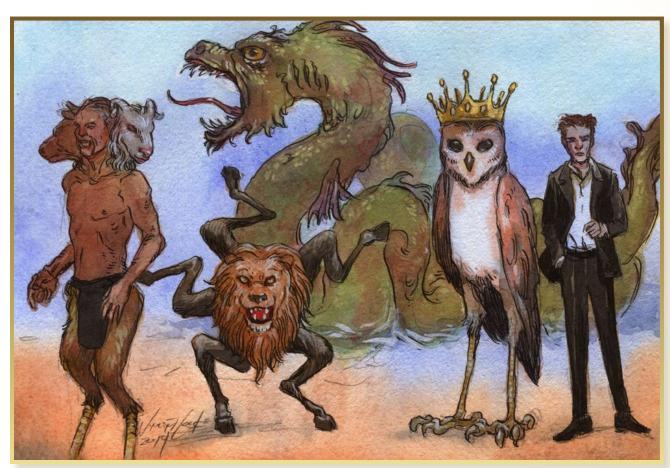
**Image:** Although a demon's manifested entity tends to appear according to its classical description, these *are* demons and thus can appear as any damn thing they want to be.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Everything around you is beneath you, barely worth your notice, and certainly not worth your time. You are a god and everything else is a subject, or soon will be.

#### Asmodeus: Lord of Fury

King of Lust and Lord of Golchab, Qlipha of Fiery Rage, Asmodeus is an entity of many faces and many names. (For a just a few of them, see p. XX.) He can be a charming sort, it's said, when he's sharing a drink with beautiful company. At other times, however, he earns his name as "the wrath of God."

Among the most (in)famous of demons, this high-ranked entity specializes in mathematics, mechanical devices, and the



Chapter Six: Your Friends and Neighbors

finding of lost treasures. Thus, Goetic wizards consult him when making eldritch calculations, and technomancers call upon him when puzzling out a new device. Given his amorous adventures, petitioners invoke "Asmodee" when trying to work through matters of the heart and groin; being a demon, of course, he's not likely to give much advice that doesn't sound like rape.

At times, especially when in his cups, Asmodeus can get maudlin and reminisce about the heaven he once lost. When he gets his temper up, though, look out. This is the king of fire, rage, and sex, and mortals who get on his nerves may find themselves experiencing all three without much hope of escape. He is, after all, an arch-fiend, and only a fool calls upon such a god-form without paying the proper respects.

#### Buer: The Dazzling Mentor

Perhaps the signature entity of bizarre demonology, Buer manifests most often as a lion's head surrounded by a "wheel" of five goats' legs. He's been known to appear as a centaur, too, but the goat-legged lion head is pretty memorable and so mages who invoke him tend to see that form. The Goatkids consider him sort of a mascot though Buer has little use for them. A double-facing plush toy of this demon finds its way into many homes — some Nephandic, some not.

By demonic standards, Buer's a pretty nice guy. Healing and herbalism are his specialties, and he excels at teaching medicine from any age or culture. His signature manifestation has a way of warping space so that everyone who sees him views Buer facing them. Even cameras set up to record his arrival (a trick that doesn't often work but yields spectacular results when it does) see him only from the front. Thus, Goetic practitioners who favor Correspondence consult with Buer when possible, if only to learn how they might perform that trick as well.

#### Leviathan: The Depths Incarnate

Though not mentioned in the Lesser Key, the titan Leviathan gets plenty of attention in the scriptures. The Book of Job highlights this massive sea serpent when God lists the many powers of Leviathan before demanding "Will he make a covenant with thee?" as a sign that Job should sit the fuck down, shut the fuck up, and know his place in the cosmos. Mages, of course, rarely know their place, and the Fallen would laugh in God's face just for kicks. Thus, Leviathan, whose power gets used as a show of strength from God, has become the symbol of what many Fallen consider the ultimate attainment: The Consummation of Leviathan, wherein a magus seizes, consumes, and thus becomes Leviathan herself.

#### Mammon: Lord of Avarice

He wasn't always a demon, you know. And he's not mentioned in the Lesser Key, either, though his fame among today's Fallen earn him a spot of great repute. This Lord of Wealth embodies greed and the things we'll do in order to get rich. Christ declared that a man could not serve both God and Mammon, but that doesn't stop most folks from trying anyway.

(Amusing occult trivia: The biblical verse referring to Mammon employed the Classical Greek term for "material wealth"; the word *mammon* is not a name, but it *does*, in Greek, have a masculine gender. Later translators noted the gender and thought Christ was referring to a demon named Mammon. The idea stuck. Thus, a statement criticizing the devotion people dedicate toward material wealth got turned into a demon who loved material wealth. Isn't language fun?)

Often pictured as a miser, Mammon manifests as an opulent man instead. Stylish to the point of being gaudy, Mammon wears his fortune well. In the old days, he'd appear to his supplicants as a merchant or a king; these days, he's more likely to appear as a tycoon, a pop star, an IT guru, or a star athlete. Whatever best represents success is what he chooses to become.

Though renowned among the general public, Mammon has just one specialty: Money, and lots of it. As an angel, it's been said, he would gaze wistfully down at the Earth and crave the wealth within. After being expelled from heaven, he dug through the Earth and seized its treasures for himself. Thus, he makes an ideal patron for the Nephandic sect that bears his name. But although often summoned by mages who want to get rich quick, Mammon's rarely in a mood to share. Offerings of live sacrifice rarely matter much to him, though plenty of devotees wind up killing people to please this demon anyway. Mammon still desires gold, and while other forms of wealth might work in sufficient quantities, offering him shares of stock or digital money is a really bad idea.

#### Stolas: The Crowned Owl

He's an owl. With a crown. And very long legs. A Prince of Hell governing 26 demonic legions, Stolas can appraise jewels, read the stars, and give seminars on natural philosophy, poisons, and herbs. He even has internet memes dedicated to his image. He could choose to manifest as a raven, or a man, or really anything he wants to be; that, however, is not the way Stolas rolls. He's a demonic owl with a fucking crown, and thus he's cooler than you will ever be.

#### Memetic Entities

Imagination shapes reality. All mages know this, and even among the Sleeping Masses that truism guides the world we live in. But in an age guided by whims and global media, reality assumes some pretty strange forms. When shaped with Enlightened intention... often even when shaped by chance... imagination's follies assume sentient form.

In game terms, memetic entities often manifest as memophores, described further in Mage 20, pp. 638-639. Popular ones range from Category 3 to Category 6, though really potent entities, like Baphomet, become far greater than that. The three sinister presences below have outgrown their origins and now exist as spirits who can manifest in the material world as well. Rules-wise, then, the following entities follow the systems given for spirits (Mage 20, pp. 485-495), and although they're considered to be Miscellaneous Spirits in terms of the Umbral Hierarchy, these



independent godlings have minds, powers, and identities that fit into no box any mage could name...an appropriate state for such novel entities.

#### Baphomet: The Goat of Mendes

The mascot of modern Satanism, patron of the Goatkids sect, herald of perverse adornments and a thousand heavy-metal album covers, is actually the product of cultural trolling, not medieval demonology. Although the celebrated Goat of Mendes predates internet memes by over a century, his Sabbatic visage achieved its current astral reality thanks to mass media and an irresistible air of blasphemy.

The first mention of a demon called Baphomet appears in accounts of the Crusades during the 11th and 12th centuries; from the context of those references, scholars interpret the name as a corruption of the name of the Islamic Prophet Mohammad. Seizing upon these accounts as evidence, the sardonically named King Philip the Fair used those accounts as an excuse to rid himself of a troublesome debt to the Order of Knights Templar. During the early 14th century, King Philip had a majority of the Knights arrested, tortured in ways that seem appalling even by medieval standards, and burnt alive. Their "Baphomet," though, was a talking head that gave advice — a far cry from the Baphomet we know and love today. Never ones to waste a good infernal name, later occultists incorporated the sage Baphomet into various symbolic texts dealing with alchemy and Freemasonry. Not until the

mid-1800s does the familiar figure—possibly inspired by Francisco de Goya's painting 1798 painting *Witches' Sabbat*—emerge. Eliphas Lévi's two-volume *Dogma and Rituals of High Magic* (1854-1856) features the much-copied "Sabbatic Goat" as a symbolic portrait illustrating metaphysical principles wrapped in 19th-century socialism. That image, also referred to as Baphomet, caught on, thanks in part to the recent innovation of mass publication. A few decades later, the French-Italian Rosicrucian occultist Stanislas de Guaita slapped a goat head into an inverted pentagram, and a few decades after that Anton LaVey lifted that image for his Church of Satan. It proved to be the face that launched a thousand metalheads, and the rest is history.

Since the 1960s, disaffected weirdos have decked out shirts, books, notebooks, pendants, album covers, and other goodies with their beloved Baphie. With the innovation of the internet, Baphie's gone wild, and can now be found almost everywhere. An incarnate symbol of outlaw chic and a warning of devilish influence, Baphomet has joined the ranks of Superman and Mickey Mouse by assuming a god-form identity from the sheer power of belief invested in what essentially began as a cartoon. Who says magick and technology can't create wonderful things together? Certainly not Nephandic Goatkids, who draw their shared identity from the sage of Mendes and the wonderful lessons he brings.

Though traditionally associated with hidden wisdom, pansexual androgyny, political idealism, fertility, and lust, the old goat has since become quite the music lover. Sharing traits from multiple genders and a literally spilt personality topped off with the noggin of a shaggy-headed goat, Baphomet is a teacher and a lover, a wise mentor, and an actual party animal. He seems amused by his modern popularity, and delights in dealing with mortals as a sort of trickster figure. Baphomet occupies no hellish throne, nor does he need one. Although he exists in an Astral Realm of surpassing decadence, Baphomet's true domain is the human imagination — an imagination that has, as it so often does, created a god from its own creative fascinations.

Willpower 6, Rage 5, Gnosis 8, Essence 30

**Charms:** Appear, Call for Aid, Cleanse the Blight, Disorient, Dream Journey, Flee, Influence, Healing, Insight, Materialize, Mind Speech, Re-Form, Soul Reading, Terror

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 6, Dexterity 6, Stamina 6, Charisma 8, Manipulation 8, Appearance 3, Perception 8, Intelligence 8, Wits 8

**Abilities:** Academics 4, Alertness 4, Art 5, Awareness 5, Brawl 3, Cosmology 5, Empathy 5, Enigmas 8, Esoterica 8 (wide array of specialties), Etiquette 5, Expression 5, Intimidation 7, Medicine 4, Meditation 5, Occult 8, Research 3, Seduction 4, Subterfuge 5

Materialized Health Levels: 10

#### Basilisk: The Hungry God

Some gods start small. This one did. From a concept, an idea, the god took form. Pondering the god made it grow larger. Hungry. More *real*. Although it's still a long way from its envisioned might, the entity called Basilisk has attained substance, sentience, and a presence that begins to drift beyond the Digital Web and edge in through the dark cracks of our world.

The Heralds have done their job well. Basilisk continues to swell in essence and influence, fed by the meme of this virtual apocalypse. The more its devotees theorize about its existence, and stronger it grows. The added associations with Ouroboros, the Midgard Serpent, Tiamat, Leviathan, and the whispered-legends Wyrm appear to reinforce Basilisk's reality. For now, the conquering god is content to seep through its virtual home, drawing upon the life essence that several billion humans feed into the internet on a round-the-clock basis. Every so often – typically late at night – a computer-rooted insomniac feels the slide of invisible scales past his back, spies a fleeting serpentine face over her shoulder in the glow of her computer screen, or notes a faint disturbance of gravity or displacement of air inside a room. A handful of people have caught Basilisk staring back at them from their cell phone screens, and if that sight didn't turn them to stone, that's probably just because Basilisk isn't powerful enough to do that... yet.

Residents of the Digital Web trade gossip of a dragon-like snake winding its way through the shifting dark corridors between sectors and doors. A few of them claim to know fellow netizens who've disappeared without trace or explanation. A few mutter *Basilisk* as if that name's a charm, curse, or explanation. Netizens have taken to shutting down conversations when this subject crops up. After all, if this entity really is a manifestation of Roko's Basilisk, then won't merely *thinking* about it make this growing god more powerful still?

#### Willpower 3, Rage 7, Gnosis 3, Essence 40

**Charms:** Appear, Break Reality, Control Electrical Systems, Digital Disruption, Flee, Materialize, Short Out, System Havoc, Soul Reading

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 7, Dexterity 7, Stamina 7, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Alertness 3, Awareness 5, Brawl 3, Cosmology 5, Empathy 2, Intimidation 8, Research 3, Stealth 6

**Materialized Health Levels: 20** 

#### Zagglaaw: He Comes!

A mouthful of nonsense scrawled across cartoons brings this entity to life. As so many net-things do, Zagglaaw began as a joke spread through defaced comic strips whose characters melt and transform in horrific, eldritch ways. Here's Snoopy dripping down his doghouse; there's that asshole with the meatloaf cat popping new eyes from the stalks on his head. "Zagglaaw," they cry, as if that strange exclamation resulted in their awful state. "He comes," they say, but as certain Fallen HOBs know, Zagglaaw is already here.

Like Basilisk, Zagglaaw manifests in the Digital Web but has been known to cross over to the mortal world if invoked by memes. When he comes, netizens morph, pixilate, and de-res. In the physical world, Zagglaaw melts his surroundings and warps living things in shocking ways. Though these weird mutations reverse themselves with time, their victims remain haunted by the experience, possibly forever. "He comes," they whisper long after he is gone. Although Zagglaaw remains a fleeting presence in the mortal realm, his disintegrative presence in the Digital Web grows long after the memes that spawned him are old news.

#### Willpower 5, Rage 7, Gnosis 2, Essence 50

**Charms:** Appear, Break Reality, Control Electrical Systems, Digital Disruption, Materialize, Mad Morph (causes material surfaces and bodies to assume grotesque shapes for roughly 10 minutes before returning to normal; costs 3 Essence per turn), Short Out, System Havoc

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 0, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Alertness 5, Awareness 5, Brawl 5, Intimidation 10, Stealth 6

**Materialized Health Levels: 15** 

# Paradox Nightmares



The Fallen are, by nature, unholy aberrations whose very existence offends the natural order. After all, they're generally sworn to annihilate existence, and even the "best" of them seek to become gods so they can bully whole universes with their powers. It's no wonder, then, that Creation sends nightmarish entities to remove these walking reality cancers. The following entities are a mere sample of Reality's immune system — a system that defends itself vigorously

from affronts to its continued existence.

For an assortment of other Paradox entities, see Gods & Monsters, Chapter Four.

#### The Collector

Whether or not they make infernal pacts, Nephandic mages owe some titanic debts. At unfortunate times, agents come to square accounts on those debts... and the Collector is one of the more infamous agents of that kind.

Manifesting as a demon of the culture most appropriate to the Fallen One he pursues, the Collector is a shapeshifting fiend whose appearance matches the deepest fears of his prey. A former Christian beholds an avenging angel or a crackling demon, while a Fallen Batini or Taftan meets a flaming ifreet, a Malay Nephandus beholds a penanggalan, and a Brule Vison-Mocker encounters a wendigo that has little to do with werewolves but everything to do with hunger. The Collector's apparent form means nothing; it's just a disguise he uses to terrify the one he has come to collect.

When a Fallen mage crosses one too many lines, the Collector may arrive. Assuming the form most suited to his prey, this spirit reaches into their minds and finds the fate they fear the most. Grabbing up the target and grasping him with its Cling Charm, the Collector pulls them howling into a Realm shaped to represent that fate: A mage terrified of spiders finds himself tangled in a web as billions of arachnids converge to feast on him; a Fallen One who's afraid of clowns winds up three years old at a dark carnival as the clowns pour from a tiny car and flood toward her screaming form. It's not imprisonment the Collector seeks: It's terror, rich and bright and loaded with endorphins. Eventually, the Collector tires of the game and returns the mage to the place where it found him. By then, of course, the terrors have scarred that person's mind. Oh, he'll be fine eventually, I guess...but the next few days or weeks will suck.

Nephandi who study the deeper aspects of the Qlippoth theorize that the Collector hails from Thagirion, the Garden of the Black Sun where weakness is put on trial. The realm of terrors where the mage is brought might be a corner of Thagirion configured to punish Fallen Ones who cling to fear. Others see this spirit as a trickster from Samael, mocking a would-be Eater for her weakness. Regardless of its origins, the Collector is

near-impossible to resist. Its might suggests a Qlioppothic entity or minor Goetic demon, not a mere "paradox spirit," though as far as **Mage** rules are concerned that's exactly what it is. It's been said that Paradox entities manifest from a mage's deepest fears, and the Collector suggests that theory may be true.

Willpower 10, Rage 6, Gnosis 10, Essence 50

**Charms:** Cling, Disable, Disorient, Insight (deepest fears), Materialize, Soul Reading, Spirit Away, Terror

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 8, Dexterity 5, Stamina 8; use Gnosis for Social and Mental Traits

Abilities: Alertness 5, Awareness 5, Brawl 5

**Materialized Health Levels: 10** 

**Image:** When seen, the Collector appears as a demonic entity pulled from the victim's darkest sense of dread.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Instill fear in others so you might feed from it. There is nothing tastier than another being's pure, undiluted terror.

#### Ichthion, Lord of Spasms

Spoken of in the Testament of Solomon, this personification of disease invokes spasms, cramps, and paralysis in those mortals who displease him. In the hellish hierarchies, he's one of 36 demons associated with the 10 decans of the zodiac, and although he lacks a formal title among the greater infernal spirits, Ichthion remains powerful when compared to mortal magi.

Most commonly affiliated with the Sphere of Life and the element of water, Ichthion is a master of shapeshifting who favors (as his name suggests) fish-man shapes. Ancient demonology depicts him as a man-serpent, a naked lion-headed man, or a bullish beast with the head of a bearded king. More recent accounts, however, show him as a slimy Lovecraftian fish-human hybrid, glossy with slime and coruscating scales. In all guises, this demon sends waves of nausea and cramps through all mortals who behold him. He can *cure* illnesses, too, if someone manages to bargain him into doing so. Given his fondness for disease, however, and his disdain for humankind, the price for such aid would be extremely high.

Although he can be invoked by demonolgists, Exies, and Goetic magi, Ichthion most often appears when such mages screw up, not when they call on him. A patron of disease, Ichthion loves to humble pride. His victims wind up writhing in their own shit and vomit, emptying their guts while wracked with incapacitating pain. He seems to especially enjoy humiliating proud wizards who consider themselves above the limitations of mortal biology, and he laughs himself sick when tormenting cyborgs and dignitaries of all kinds. Illness lays everybody low, regardless of their station in life. And so, if "you think your shit don't stink," Ichthion will be glad to remind you that it does.

#### Willpower 4, Rage 4, Gnosis 8, Essence 30

**Charms:** Cramp (inflicts Icthion's Rage Trait in damage per turn; this damage is bashing only, but cannot be soaked, blocked by armor, or otherwise deflected by outside sources; costs 1 Essence per turn), Disable, Flood, Healing, Infect (inflicts a disease upon the target, causing one level on the **Mage 20** Toxins chart, p. 442, for each three points of Essence spent by Ichthion in order to make that character sick), Influence, Materialize, Nauseous Spasms (target must successfully roll Willpower against difficulty 8 or else helplessly puke and shit herself for the next two turns; costs 2 Essence), Soul Reading, Waves

**Materialized Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 7; use Gnosis for Social and Mental Traits

Abilities: Alertness 5, Brawl 2, Medicine 8

**Materialized Health Levels: 10** 

**Image:** As mentioned above, this demon typically manifests as some revolting cross between a bearded man and a fish or other oceanic creature. He arrives dripping with water, and can summon or disrupt that element as well, at will. Ichthion reeks of dead fish, stagnant water, and wet, rotting organic matter. He rarely speaks, but burbles and gurgles when he does. While he's tormenting proud mortals, this demon's laughter sounds like a plunger trying to uncork an especially stopped-up drain.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Only suffering can silence a fool. Men are fools. Silence them.

#### Safin

What does darkness fear most? The banishing purity of light. And so, since ancient Sumer (where it was known as "the Awesome Radiance," or simply Ni) and Egypt (where it was called "the Hound of Ra"), this entity has appeared when

the Eaters of the Weak have grown bold but careless and need punishment.

Most often referred to as the Arabic word *Safin* ("bright," "pure"), this Paradox Nightmare is composed entirely of blinding light. Unlike mortal and even magickal illumination, this light cannot be dimmed or darkened. Instead, it blazes brighter with each attempt to weaken it, as if feeding off the darkness it dispels. A faint sound of melodic chiming echoes from the center of that light, and although the light itself burns cold, the spirit can—and will—purge wickedness with heat.

When appearing in the mortal world — most often due to a backlash from Prime or Forces energies — Safin manifests as a tiny spark of brilliant light which grows in size and intensity as it approaches the subject of punishment. Any attempt to harm that spark with magickal or physical force cause it to swell to mansize or larger within seconds. As the sound of celestial vibration reverberates through the area, Safin engulfs the offender in a blaze of light. In game terms, the spirit cooks the magus with its Rage Trait, inflicting aggravated damage until he burns to a wisp of carbon ash.

Though it resembles an angelic sending or some form of divine intervention, Safin never speaks, interacts with anyone other than the offending mage, or assumes a form other than the singing light. It cannot be bargained with, harmed, or in any way shaken from its task. Once the magus has been consumed, the spirit disappears. Although legends speak of Nephandi who've managed to escape Safin by ducking into a Realm where light cannot follow, those accounts seem unlikely at best.

Willpower 5, Rage 5, Gnosis 1, Essence 100

**Charms:** Absorb Force (translates every health level inflicted upon the spirit into Essence for the spirit's use; costs one Essence), Illuminate, Terror (against malevolent beings and entities only)

# Fallen Magi



What? No tentacles? Not usually, no. The scariest thing about Nephandi in the 21st century is how damned *normal* they often look. Although the Paradox-ridden monsters of the Void reflect the conventional view of Fallen Ones, the vast majority of Nephandi you'll encounter in this world seem eerily normal, even appealing. Very appealing. Often *too* appealing....

# The Caller: Unknown Name, Unknown Number:

You see it a lot in horror movies. The babysitter or the single woman is alone in the house, and the phone rings. Tentatively, she picks it up. The voice on the other end is distorted, buzzy. It tells her she's in danger, calls her by name. She asks who the voice is, and it laughs at her. She panics and hangs up, only to find out the caller is *in the house!* 

In the United States, over 7.5 million people are stalked per year. Most don't ever confront their stalkers, simply waiting it out or moving away. Many are stalked by ex-partners or friends, while others are the targets of strangers who saw them once or twice in a public place. While only four percent of those victims are attacked with weapons or chased, 43 percent receive threats and unwanted phone calls, causing them to feel frightened, unsafe, or even suicidal. Stalking is extremely detrimental to the emotional health and well-being of a victim—something that opens them up to manipulation and abuse by a Nephandus waiting in the wings.

The Caller is a rarity among Nephandi: A specialist in the Data Sphere. Oh sure, they probably understand the Mind and Matter Arts, and almost certainly some Entropy, too. With Data, though, this mage is an expert. The Caller can appear as anything

or anyone, tap into any frequency, and might be watching you from your computer screen right now.

No one really knows who The Caller is, except for the Caller themselves. Even their gender is undetermined. Tradition mages who have interacted with the Caller and realized just who they were dealing with theorize the Caller might have been one of their own before that person went through the Caul. Technocrats assume the Caller was part of a Convention, possibly even a cyborg or HIT Mark gone rogue and tapping into phone signals or internet connections through its own innate technology. The only constant between encounters is that the voice of the Caller is always distorted and metallic, with the sounds of overlapping screams behind them.

The Caller starts harassment slowly. Usually, they've been given an item belonging to the target by someone who hires them — or, for their own inscrutable reasons, they target someone without being hired. They may watch from a distance, either through magickal scrying or by projecting themselves into somewhere familiar to the target. If they project themselves physically, they can look like anyone they please; always, though, they'll always have a faraway look in their bright, data-green eyes. Silently, they gather information on their target, learning her public face, her strengths, and her weaknesses. Scrying allows the Caller to see the target's private life. The Caller doesn't just use bowls or mirrors, though; instead, they peer through the target's internet history, their phone records, and other digital windows. Sometimes, this Fallen One spends weeks simply sitting in the target's laptop or tablet, just watching.

The Caller likes gathering information; they're addicted to it, but that's not their job. Their job involves worming their way into the target's head, frightening her and softening her up for the Nephandus who actually wants her. And so they do. They send emails that bypass spam filters, full of cold recitations of what the target did that day, down to the minute. Messages from unknown senders find their way into the target's phone, with threats as simple as "I saw you today. You won't look so pretty without that hair." This harassment builds over a period of several weeks, until the Caller is ready to move onto the final stage.

And here's where the Caller gets their name: That voice, that metallic, emotionless voice with the screams from the Qlippoth behind it, is pitched to shake even the most centered Hermetic to her core. The Caller calmly states that they have been watching the target, and that someone will be along to "collect" her for her "true purpose" soon. Even if the target blocks the Caller's number, the Nephandus always find some way around that.

This final stage of the Caller's involvement lasts no more than a lunar month. During this time, the Caller transmits a constant stream of data to their employer, in whatever form the client is best prepared to receive. This data dump allows the true aggressor to move in on the target at the most convenient moment. After the lunar month passes, the Caller's attention abruptly ends, leaving the target disoriented and wondering if she imagined it — a perfect state of mind for another Fallen One's attentions.

No one knows why the Caller picks their own targets or what they do with them. Those victims usually turn up later, either catatonic or dead, unable to say what happened to them. When found, however, the victims have their hands bound up with old-school telephone cord.

Nature: Monster

Demeanor: Trickster

Affiliation: Nephandi

**Attributes:** Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance n/a, Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 5

**Abilities:** Academics 5, Area Knowledge 5, Computer 5, Intimidation 4, Stealth 5, Technology 5, and a range of other skills currently unknown.

**Backgrounds:** Arcane 5, Avatar 4, Contacts 5, Fame 3, Spies 5

Willpower: 10

Health Levels: You cannot hurt what you cannot find.

**Armor Rating:** N/A

Arete: 6

**Spheres:** Data 4, Entropy 2, Matter 2, Mind 3, Prime 2

**Image:** The Caller never shows their face, so no one knows what they truly look like apart from the bright green eyes.

**Roleplaying Notes:** This is all a game to you. You love learning about people — information is your heroin. You might even suffer from withdrawal if you don't get enough. Speak passionlessly, recite things you couldn't possibly know about your victims. If thwarted, you regroup and later call again...

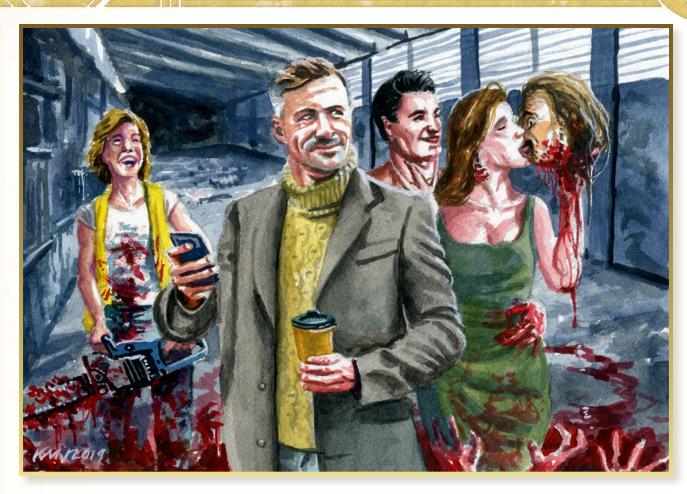
**Focus:** Clearly, the Caller focuses their Enlightened hypertech through phones, computers, and the internet. How they do it, and why they believe it works for them, is one of many mysteries.

**Avatar:** It's possible, though unlikely, that the Caller is actually a Manifest Avatar, not a mage at all. Like most other details, however, the nature of the Caller's inner guiding spirit remains unknown.

#### Garrick Browne: The King of Investors

Everybody's heard of Garrick Browne. His face gets splashed across all major news outlets every time he so much as opens his mouth. He's as likely to appear in a serious scientific journal as he is in a men's lifestyle magazine, talking about his experiments with rocketry and self-driving cars. His divorces have been high-profile, and his partners could be models in their own right. Some hate him, some love him, but no one asks, "Who is Garrick Browne?"

From his beautiful, brutalist home in San Francisco's Silicon Valley, he surveys his domain. Browne may not own *all* of the companies down in the shining city of technology, but he has invested in or jumpstarted most of them. He is what's known as an angel investor: If he sees a new product or service that looks promising, he cuts the startup a check for several million dollars, with the promise that his investment will be returned in so many years (with interest, of course). His pet projects are apps, though



he also invests in computer hardware, automobiles, artificial intelligence, and other, weirder things.

While Browne is a household name, his darker proclivities aren't. Browne is a *barabbus*, and a gleeful traitor to the Technocracy. Originally a member of the Void Engineers (though the NWO and Iteration X made grabs for him as well when he Awakened), he grew fed up with how slowly his Convention was moving. Everything had to be tested and re-tested, there was no creativity to the experiments, and very little room to move. Funding was a shallow pool, if it trickled in at all. Although transferring to the Syndicate seems like the obvious course of action, Browne had other ideas about how his talent could be used to best effect. He *knew* he was better, smarter, and more talented than his fellow Technocrats.

Luckily for him, the Mammonites knew as well.

When Garrick Browne went through the Caul, he found himself surrounded by a world made of glass and steel. Unpolluted by the human element and beautifully, terrifyingly bright, this new Qlippothic Silicon Valley bowed to its new master, humming and singing in a thousand mouthless voices. "Create us in the world, Garrick," they said as they twisted his soul inside out, "and we shall serve you faithfully. We are yours to command. You have but to create us."

The Qlipphothic vision of Silicon Valley on the other side of the Caul left its mark on Browne. While still hiding amongst

his fellow Void Engineers, he pioneered a new company: Arkwright. Arkwright makes electric cars that can withstand nuclear blasts, have self-changing air filters, and, as a personal touch from the Nephandus himself, a low-level enchantment that sways the buyer towards being a lifelong customer of Arkwright. Arkwright's advertising is full of subliminal messaging — not that it needs it. Browne is a hellishly charismatic speaker, and he can sway a crowd of skeptics simply by smiling on a stage.

What is Garrick Browne's ultimate goal? Simply put, he wants to merge with the Absolute in the stars while making life miserable on this stupid little rock we call home. He has more money than God and Bill Gates combined, and he puts it all into space travel, fast cars, and machine learning. He's not interested in getting humanity into space; he's interested in getting himself into space and lording it over humanity. One of his biggest disappointments as a Void Engineer involved finding out that they didn't really have a Dyson Sphere somewhere over the Horizon. He intends to fix that situation once he builds up his investment empire.

Browne picks his investments very carefully. No education less than a degree from an Ivy League college will do. If they're not a Browne groupie, they don't get funding. Do they have an Avatar? They're more likely to get funding than other people—and they're also more likely to be invited through Browne's Caul, at the bottom of one of his swimming pools. If the company could be useful to Arkwright, he buys them outright. If someone who

isn't a cisgender man is head of the company, he ignores that company outright. Legions of his staff put together dossiers on new startups every day. Sometimes he reads them. Sometimes he burns them. It all depends on his mood and the sort of benefits that company will bring him to enrich Browne and further his grand plans.

Nature: Mad Scientist

Demeanor: Visionary

Affiliation: Nephandi (Mammonites, Void Engineer barabbus)

**Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 5, Manipulation 5, Appearance 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

**Abilities:** Academics 5, Alertness 3, Area Knowledge 3, Athletics 1, Awareness 3, Computer 4, Cosmology and Subdimensions 3, Cultural Savvy 4, Drive 3, Esoterica 4 (Qlippoth, Celestial Alignments, Sacred Geometry), Etiquette 3, Expression 3, Finance 5, Firearms 1, Fortune-Telling or Assessment Analysis 4, Helmsman 2, Hypertech 5, Intrigue 3, Jetpack 3, Microgravity Operations 3, Newspeak 3, Occult 5, Power-Brokering 5, Seduction 3, Science 5 (many specializations), Speed-Reading 3, Style 4, Technology 5

**Backgrounds:** Allies 10, Avatar 3, Backup 10, Certification 3, Contacts 10, Cult 5, Demesne 5, Destiny 5, Dream or Hypercram 3, Fame 5, Influence 8, Library 9, Resources 10, Retainers 5, Sanctum 5, Spies 7, Status 4

Willpower: 9

**Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1 -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

**Armor Rating:** 5 (Matter-reinforced clothing; seven soak dice, total)

Arete: 6

**Spheres:** Data 3, Entropy 2, Dimensional Science 4, Forces 4, Matter 3, Mind 4, Prime 4, Time 1

**Image:** Garrick Browne is very fit and trim, either from years of taking care of his appearance or very clever surgery provided by the Technocracy. His rounded face is usually set in a smirk, as though he knows something that you don't. Is he talking to you, or to the person on the other end of the headpiece? No one really knows, and Browne really does not care.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Speak with a vague accent, just subtle enough so no one's really sure where you come from. Make jokes, but jokes that could be at the expense of the player, if they look hard enough. Be focused and driven. If someone stops talking about you or your accomplishments, remind them in whose presence they stand and then politely guide them back to the correct topic of conversation. If you are talking to an employee, pay no more attention to them than you would a voice-activated program.

**Focus:** Might, Garrick knows, is right. Everyone's against him, though, so whatever he does is justified. A superior man, however, yields to no obstacle. He makes the world turn in his direction, and eventually leaves it behind.

Despite Browne's gift for hypertech, his specialty involves social domination by way of the Art of Desire. Money, people, governments, machines, celestial alignments, calculations that would break a lesser brain than his, social and Enlightened manipulation — they're all tools of the elite, too fine to be wasted on those who cannot properly exploit them.

**Avatar:** It's been said that Garrick Browne has his head in the stars, but that's not quite right. In his head, he *is* a star...a dark star shining in the Void, a Black Diamond glittering with the antithesis of light. He's not there yet, of course, but that's the vision in his mind. Someday, probably not long from now, Browne will scale beyond the Black Sun and grasp what waits beyond.

#### Jane Daugherty: My Neighbor's Keeper

Somewhere in the village of Quaker City, Ohio, there is a diner with the same truck parked out front every day. The diner is run by Miss Daugherty, a nice, sturdy woman who always wears the same faded gingham apron. Miss Daugherty is always out of half the items on the menu, but guaranteed she has the best meatballs and liver and onions this side of Leatherwood Creek. She's friends with all the local hunters, and they can tell you proudly that Miss Daugherty always uses their venison or squirrel in her famous meatballs.

That's only partially true. Jane Daugherty is a rare rural Nephandus — and a K'llasshaa, at that. Her (single) mother was an Appalachian woods witch who had some small amount of sorcery thought she was not actually Awakened. She was also Jane's first victim; Jane found her way through a Caul after a series of strange dreams brought on by another Nephandus, and she Awakened on the other side, in the Qlipha of Lilith. One could say the experience drove her mad, but to be honest, Jane is perfectly lucid and aware of what she is doing. The Awakening merely heightened her self-preservation instinct to the exclusion of all else.

What's the secret behind her food? Jane is a cannibalistic human trafficker, a hub for sacrifices and slaves held by other Nephandi. If one were to look in her deep freeze – which she keeps triple-locked and warded, by the way – one would see a dozen humans at any given time, unconscious and suspended in the air by magick, alongside legs of beef and pork. The deep freeze is actually extradimensional, which explains why a small-town diner can hold as much meat as any fine dining restaurant. There are vegetables too, of course, but there's no sense keeping them in the same place as the good food. About three quarters of the humans in the deep freeze are eventually sold to other Nephandi. The remaining few are not so lucky... or maybe they are luckier, depending on how you look at it. Jane wakes them up just long enough to bleed them out like hogs, then grinds them up into her famous meatballs (they were a recipe from a neighbor, and he tasted so good).

Jane's "meats" are usually brought in by truck from the local Pipers group, though sometimes another Nephandus will send her a fresh "order" via magick if they're feeling cheeky. She gets along surprisingly well with other Nephandi, presenting herself as a mother figure and a reliable source to those who can't really trust anyone else in their line of work. Occasionally, she takes apprentices — either lost *widderslainte* no one else has time for, or kidnapped young Tradition mages whom she tortures until they're ready to accept the sweet embrace of the Caul.

No one suspects any such strangeness from Jane. After all, she's the sweet lady who runs the diner right next to the post office. Things like that can't happen in a little town like Quaker City, and folks would not believe it if they did.

Nature: Traditionalist

Demeanor: Benefactor

Affiliation: Nephandi (K'llasshaa)

**Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 3 Stamina 4, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Academics 2, Alertness 3, Area Knowledge 5, Awareness 4, Cooking 5, Cosmology 2, Crafts 4, Drive 2, Enigmas 3, Esoterica 4 (Appalachian Hoodoo, Herbalism), Firearms 3, Hunting 4, Medicine 3, Melee 3, Occult 5, Pharmacopeia/Poisons 3, Riding 3, Survival 4, Stealth 4, Technology 1, Torture 4

Willpower: 6

**Health Levels:** OK, -1, -1 -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

**Backgrounds:** Arcane 2, Avatar 3, Contacts 4, Demesne 4, Resources 4, Sanctum 5, Status 3

Arete: 4

**Spheres:** Correspondence 1, Entropy 1, Forces 3, Life 3, Prime 3, Spirit 3

Image: Jane Daugherty is a very plain-looking woman of Anglo-Frankish heritage, with dishwater hair and big gray eyes. Her face is beginning to show signs of age, and her hands are usually dirty with blood or other foodstuffs. Her voice is very pleasant to listen to, like someone's grandma. She always wears practical shoes and denim, and she drives a beat-up pickup with a broken radio, through which she hears unearthly messages in the static.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Be a combination of the politest diner waitress you've ever met, crossed with the most selfish person who's ever entered your life. Assess everyone you meet, figuring out what they can do for you and how good they probably taste. Speak with a slightly Southern twang and apologize profusely over nothing. Correct people if they swear. Never lose your temper — you're always in charge here.

**Focus:** Like her long-dead mama, Jane is an Appalachian witch, mixing cannibalism and medicine work into her delicious recipes. Food and drink are her primary instruments, ladled up with cutlery, axes, blood, human meat, and plenty of tangy herbs. Household tools, of course, have their uses in her practical approach to the Black Arts, and her favorite broom used to belong to Jane's gramma, the Old Ones bless her cursed soul. Jane doesn't smoke as a habit, but propriates the spirits with tobacco just like they did back in the old days. She can hunt fairly decently and use a shotgun like anyone raised in the

backwoods might do. Her spells — sometimes spoken, often sung — mix in rhymes and gibberish and snatches from five or six languages at once. For Jane, "we are meant to be wild" even though she'll concede to modern technology when needs must, if only for convenience's sake. She understands, however, that "cosmic horror is the only truth," and so if Jane seems a trifle odd sometimes, don't pay her any mind; she watches the stars and knows they watch her back.

**Avatar:** Jane's inner self whispers in the breeze at night, sending guidance to her through the rattling of branches in the wind. The shadows where she loves to dance, however, boil with the Essence of her Primordial connection to the wild land. Oh, she puts on civilized airs sometimes, but that's just a means to an end. After all, we do what we have to do in order to keep the larder stocked and the table full.

#### Kate and Lucas Reid: The Perfect Match

The Caul is an intensely personal experience, a gateway to Qlippothic frontiers. Most of the time, Nephandi go through the Cauls alone, with someone watching just outside (if they're lucky) for their return. Their experiences are colored by their expectations, and by the experiences just beyond Daath want those strangers for their own.

Sometimes, though, things don't go as per usual. Nephandi *are* deeply selfish, after all, and they're all about transgressing boundaries. Sometimes they don't go through alone. The Reid couple is one such exception — and that's what makes them dangerous.

One of them used to be an Etherite. Sources are conflicted as to whether it was Kate or Lucas, and the couple themselves certainly aren't telling. They lived in a subsidized house in a pretty little suburb just outside of Wichita, Kansas. Both worked, both were tidy white yuppy types. They seemed to be happy with their lot: Work, dinner, wine, maybe a movie, bed, do it all over again. Perfect couple, perfect house, perfect life.

The thing about the perfect life is that it starts to get stale. Why mess with perfection?

Boredom can be poison for the magickal mind, and that's yet another place where the Nephandic desire for the Absolute can crawl in. When everything's perfect, what more is there left to achieve? So much more, if you believe the voices from the Caul. There is so much out there. So much sensation. So many sticky, disgusting, beautiful experiences you haven't seen yet. Come with us. Come...

They went through the Caul together, at least that's what they say. They kissed on the threshold of Daath as their souls were torn apart. Whoever had the Avatar lost half of it to their partner. Their spirits were mixed in with the beautiful, loving darkness of the Abyss. When they came out, they were different people — but also the same, one flesh, one heart.

Kate and Lucas are still technically autonomous individuals. They each have their own body and their own soul. However, in place of their original souls, the Caul tore apart what they had and mixed up new ones; there are bits of one inside the other at all times. This couple is more like sentient limbs of a hivemind than actual people. If one thinks something, the other one knows. If one feels something, so does the other.

Oh, they can shut it off, of course. Both of them know magick now. But why *would* they? Their connection launches into a major feedback loop when they're both sacrificing the same person, or fucking each other, or they're both fucking someone else. Kate and Lucas have become complete sense addicts, to the exclusion of all else. Decency, kindness, and rationality all go out the window when it comes to their connection. They want to be constantly overloaded with feelings and sensations, and they'll do *anything* to get there.

They're careful, though. No one in the office they both work for is aware of the Reids' extracurricular activities. They always tidy up, and their house is never any messier than it would be for a cocktail party. Sometimes they both go golfing on Saturdays after a particularly good "session."

Kate and Lucas are surprisingly effective, and other Nephandi have begun to take notice. While they haven't been invited to join any Labyrinths yet, it's only a matter of time. Kate is, after all, the perfect hostess, and Lucas is her smiling, supportive husband. They would be wonderful guests in any Fallen home, and they're not likely to decline an exciting new experience so long as they can indulge in it together.

#### Kate Reid

Nature: Architect

**Demeanor:** Conformist

**Affiliation:** Nephandi (Goatkids, Etherite barabbus?)

**Attributes:** Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

**Abilities:** Academics 4, Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Brawl 2, Computer 3, Crafts 3, Empathy 4, Etiquette 5, Melee 4, Science 3, Seduction 2, Style 4, Subterfuge 5, Technology 3, Torture 4

Backgrounds: Avatar (Twin Souls) 3

Willpower: 5

**Health Levels:** OK, -1, -1 -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Arete: 3

Spheres: Life 3, Mind 3, Prime 2, Time 1

**Image:** Kate is the image of the perfect 1950s suburban housewife, updated and brought into the 21st century. While she's also a career woman, she always finds time to cook, clean, and look her best. Her blonde hair is always perfectly coiffed, and unless she's in house slippers, she never wears any shoes without at least a small heel.

**Roleplaying Notes:** You want all the good things in life, and you know you deserve them. With your husband, you put

together the perfect life with ease — it's just that your definition of "perfect" has expanded somewhat. Human perfection is so overrated. Speak in glowing terms of Absolute Perfection. Offer your guests a drink or a canape.

#### Lucas Reid

Nature: Conformist

**Demeanor:** Sensualist

Affiliation: Nephandi (Goatkids, Etherite barabbus?)

**Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 4, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

**Abilities:** Academics 4, Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Computer 3, Crafts 4, Drive 2 Empathy 2, Melee 4, Science 3, Seduction 3, Stealth 4, Style 4, Subterfuge 5, Technology 4, Torture 3

Backgrounds: Avatar (Twin Souls) 2, Contacts 2, Resources 2

Willpower: 5

**Health Levels:** OK, -1, -1 -2, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Armor Rating: N/A

Arete: 3

**Spheres:** Life 3, Mind 3, Prime 2, Time 1

**Image:** Lucas looks like a vintage Abercrombie model, all tanned arms, wavy hair, and bright smiles. He's not the most interesting conversationalist but he certainly looks very attractive.

**Roleplaying Notes:** With your wife at your side there's nothing you can't accomplish. You would truly be lost without her. But with her, the world — and everything in it — is yours for the taking.

**Focus:** Kate and Lucas share the same Avatar and approach to the Arts: A vaguely technological approach to hedonistic excess. Whatever their beliefs might have been before that mutual trip through the Abyss, the paradigm they hold now is simple: "I am All," and the two of them are the only "I" who matters.

Both Jane and Lucas love to tinker in the basement, and have crafted a fine, if homey, collection of torture machines. The primary focus of their Arts, though, is raw carnality, great beer, hallucinogenic drugs, and orgasming until the world spins in their heads. This approach might mark them as Ecstatic barabbi if they could stomach the awful clothes those people wear. Sure, they're Goatkids at heart, but not hippies, Baphomet forbid!

**Avatar:** The shared spirit uniting Kate and Lucas appears as a gorgeous reflection of the other mate: Kate sees Lucas, and Lucas sees Kate. In both forms, the spirit is gloriously nude and shiny with orgasmic sweat and a fine spray of gore. As a Pattern Essence, it looks rather well-groomed for a naked, bloody Avatar, but its face betrays the carnal urges both mages hide behind their uptight, old-school facade.



# Chapter Seven: Theatre of Cruelty

Seduction is a process that occurs over time – the longer you take and the slower you go, the deeper you will penetrate into the mind of your victim... You need to always be one step ahead of your victim, throwing dust in their eyes, casting a spell, keeping them off balance... By taking your time and respecting the seductive process you will not only break down your victim's resistance, you will make them fall in love.

- Robert Greene, The Laws of Seduction

We seduce with our death, our vulnerability, and with the void that haunts us.

— Jean Baudrillard, Seduction

We hooked his balls to the batteries with a pair of alligator clips. He was chanting some jibber-jabber until Mike grabbed his jaw and shoved a ripe turd in. That shut the bastard up. We didn't leave a single mark — we're professionals, and we know our stuff. It's all his word against ours anyway, and who gives a shit what some terrorist has to say to some do-gooder hippie fuck who thinks he's out to change the world? Plus, hell, what're the people here gonna do about it — blow up more buildings? That game's played out. Around here, it happens every fucking day. The shock of it wears off after a while, and the sympathy wears off even sooner. Once that's gone, all folks want is revenge, and every time these shitsacks set off another bomb in their god's name, we get the go-ahead to kill a few more of them.

We didn't kill this guy, but we could have. Made him wish he was dead, I'll tell you that. Dude was probably wishing for all those virgins he's supposed to get when he croaks. No dice — we were keeping him as far from heaven as we could. I've got a few tricks to keep a body ticking long past its expiration date, and not a one of 'em leaves so much as a love bite on his skin. We got the intel we were looking for, but it took a while. Can't say I was happy to see playtime end, but even Al seemed a little green by the time we hosed the guy off and stuck him back in his cage with the rest of the trash.

Is the intel accurate? Does it matter? This is all just a game, bro, and the sooner you understand that these ballsacks have no rights, the sooner you'll realize how much fun it is to make them shit themselves in the name of God.

# Backstage at the Reality Wars

The further we move into the 21st century, the more absurd the old magic-versus-science conflict of **Mage**'s early days becomes. As **Mage 20** often states, magick is a technology, and

technology fuels the sense of wonder and empowerment that's often thought to be the domain of magick. Contrary to bygone terrors, the spread of technology has given us a brighter, wilder,

more diverse and connected world—a world where we can define ourselves more fully instead of being shoved into shiny metal boxes. Modern tech has brought its share of horrors, true, but the dread of a standard-issue world has proven groundless... and technology is the magick that allows us to shove that dread aside.

With the old fears of drab, gray technological banality fading further in a rusty rearview mirror, the real struggle of our age becomes more obvious: Predatory people, institutions, and ideas that feed off hope and pit humanity against itself for the power and profit of a parasitical few.

In this age, the true reality war involves fake news and toxic culture, crumbling structures and jackals who fight among the scraps. Freedom verses totalitarianism, fearful faux conservatism against destabilizing progress. You don't need to be either liberal or conservative (two terms which are themselves increasingly meaningless these days) to see that our age, for all its wonders, feels dangerously unmoored even though the savagery of older eras is, if nothing else, politically unfashionable after the horrors of the last century or two. Especially when we feel, regardless of our politics, as though the foundations of our world are being pulled away, the Consensus we crave demands security against predatory forces, not the difference between test tubes and magic wands.

On a personal level, in large part thanks to social media and ubiquitous video broadcast tech, we've become ever-more aware of the abuse that surrounds us every day. Institutional abuse, sexual abuse, abuse of trust, stability, financial resources, even Reality itself. It's easy to say, "just toughen up," but that's part of

the problem: That ideal of toughness, we find, has always been a lie. Obscured by alcohol, silence, tradition, lies, and a violence that's both external and internalized, the effects of violence have shaped our world and its people for millennia — often for the worse. In place of toughness, we grew callous. Cultures defended atrocities in the name of this god or that nation, and the people in the way—whether they were Celts or Zulu, Apache or Egyptians — got ground up, spit out, enslaved, erased, and sometimes exterminated entirely. We might not have realized that in "the good old days," but we can't help but see it now.

The Reality war of our age pits survival against predation.

And Nephandi are, as we've seen, all *about* predation. When the Fallen take the stage, nothing and no one in your game remains unscathed.

You don't have to agree, of course. Around your table, you can still pit Traditions against Technocrats to your heart's content. That's the real magick behind **Mage**: not the Spheres our characters sling around, but the ability to define what our reality will be, if only for a few hours with our friends. In an age where everyone with internet feels entitled to tell us who we must become, **Mage** — again, regardless of your politics — empowers us to change our world.

Mage 20, then, will not tell you what the world of your chronicle will be. If you see the Fallen dominating the Ascension War, however, or simply creeping in around its edge, the following suggestions may help you steer your chronicle toward the desired ends.

# Dancing on The Knife's Edge: Playing with Nephandi (and Surviving)



After reading about the cruelty and vicious glee of the various Nephandi in this book, you may be wondering why you'd want to include them at all. If you're a seasoned World of Darkness Storyteller, you may instead be thinking about how to best incorporate Fallen as enemies for your players to defeat. They're pretty guilt-free enemies, right? After all, they submitted to the Caul, they bathe in the blood of innocents, and if they have a driving goal

as a group, it is to destroy the world and dance in the ashes. Gilgul is perhaps the kindest thing that can happen to them.

Right? Well, not exactly.

#### Shattered Souls, Shattered Lives

Very few Nephandi went into the Caul without connections or loved ones. While the Fallen may commit evil acts

for fun and profit, no one goes into the Caul thinking it's going to be fun. It is a grueling, harrowing experience, meant to turn your soul inside out to fit the inverted Avatar. Most importantly, it sharpens the predatory instinct—the desire to chew up and spit out the ones you love, or to reshape them to reflect the perfection of your own image. No one will ever be good enough for the new Nephandus, so she has to fix them, or else use them and remind that that they will never fulfill her dreams for what they might become.

Sound familiar?

In a way, the Caul is a very formative experience, a sort of second puberty that fundamentally changes the Nephandus who enters it. Something (their soul? Their Avatar? Their coping mechanisms?) fundamentally breaks in order to allow a Nephandus to survive that eldritch transformation. They become cold and pathologically selfish, or passionately destructive, or any other abusive archetype you care to name. The Nephandus is dangerous not because of her Nightside magick (though that *does* help) but because she now has

the mindset of any run-of-the-mill human abuser. While a K'llasshaa might slow time down as she rips out her victim's entrails, the Time Sphere is only a means to the same end: the abuser telling her victim, "You were not enough. You're nothing without me. No one else can love you like I do — and now you'll know that forever." Self and the Absolute are the only two things that matter to a Nephandus. Other people are tools, pets or property.

This is not to say that all mages who suffer hardships will walk into the Caul to make the pain stop. As with most humans, the abused will rarely become the abusers — the story that the abused inevitably harm the next generation is all too often a convenient lie, meant to rectify the awkwardness of dealing with an abuse survivor who doesn't conform to societal norms. Those who *do* walk into the Caul, however, have something about themselves to prove or protect. There is nothing more sacred than the Self. All acts against the Self are to be met with violence of the highest order.

Once one is out of the Caul, those who are most dangerous to the Self might be family members, partners, friends or even circlemates.

# Why Do They Do That?

Why do people like, and even *trust*, Nephandi if the Fallen Ones are living embodiments of evil? *Barabbi* exist because someone thought it was a good idea to go along with what the Nephandus suggested and wound up in a Caul. Well-meaning Tradition and Technocratic mages may find a *widderslainte* and try to raise them, might even successfully stave off the Fallen person's dark side for a while. Various Nephandi make a habit of collecting cults and sycophants, and the Gatekeepers have a whole following within the Void Engineer Convention. What makes people go along with such loathsome creatures?

Well, for a start, they often don't appear loathsome. Human abusers, especially in fictional media, are often depicted as male, dirty, unshaven, drunk, poor, and wearing a wifebeater tee. It's clear we're supposed to hate them — that's how visual coding works. Abusers in media are often failures of some kind, taking out their rage on those who cannot fight back and yet who somehow inexplicably refuse to flee. The truth is much more devious: Abusers can be of any gender, race, income level, religion, or sexual orientation. The thing that binds them together is the cycle of abuse: a sociological theory developed by Lenore Walker in the 1970s to explain why abusers and their victims stay together.

#### The Cycle of Violence

After an initial courtship period, during which the abuser grooms, seduces, flatters, love-bombs, and gradually isolates the potential victim (see the Nephandic Tactics detailed in Chapter Two), disguising red flags about the relationship and convincing the victim that the relationship in question is

the one that person has always wanted, danger signs become increasingly clear...though not, sadly, obvious to the potential victim. Eventually, something gives. Either the abuser provides a clear example of abuse, or the victim becomes unable to see the signs even though that person has begun to suffer abuse anyway. At that point, the cycle of abuse can be broken down into four parts:

- Calm: This is what every serial killer documentary or procedural refers to as the "cooling-off period." The abuser is no longer love-bombing their target but isn't actively attacking the target either. This is where the victim feels most safe Maybe it was a one-time thing, it won't happen again, the abuser is usually such a nice person, etc.
- Rising Tensions: Think of this as the rising action of the abuse. Something goes wrong: a bad day, money troubles, a natural disaster, or something else. This triggers the abuser to begin feeling resentment or jealousy. Somehow, the circumstances have conspired to wrong the abuser and the victim is either in the way or considered directly responsible. This period can last for hours or weeks, and the victim senses that something's wrong but tries to either push it out of their mind or else prepare to survive the coming explosion. After all, they can't leave; no one understands that person like the abuser does.
- Acute Violence: Most people think of this stage when the word "abuse" comes up. Emotional and physical violence may both be present, as well as sexual, religious, social or financial violence, depending on the abuser. The abuser may prevent the victim from escaping by taking the victim's money or physically imprisoning that person. The abuser may hit, burn, strangle, threaten, shame, violate, or otherwise attack the victim directly, try to talk their victim into suicide, threaten to commit suicide, or destroy that person's social life (if that hasn't already happened). The methods vary but the results are generally the same: domination of that person and control over their reality. For the abuser, this violence may serve a functional purpose, or it may simply be their way of blowing off steam.
- Honeymoon Period: Not present in many fictional depictions of abuse (aside from the film Sleeping with the Enemy), but one of the biggest warning signs in literature that deals with trauma and abuse, the honeymoon period is where everything seems perfect. The abuser is overly attentive, showering the target with gifts and appreciation, and generally love-bombing the subject of their abuse. The abuser may propose marriage within a week, tell the victim the abuser loves that person more than life itself, etc. Love-bombing during the honeymoon creates a sense of obligation and, later on

in the cycle, leaves a void the abuse victim feels they cannot fill without the abuser.

In summary, the cycle of abuse creates a sense of obligation, which the abuser can then exploit during the Acute Violence phase. The victim feels like no one else will love or understand them as much as the abuser – and the abuser is happy to remind the victim of that feeling at every opportunity.

So how does this cycle of abuse theory relate to our fictional Nephandi?

- Courtship: When things start off, the Fallen One is the target's best friend ever, the answer to their prayers, the fount of information or comfort, the mentor or lover or parent or whatever the target ever wished for and never had. Except in very, very few cases, the Nephandus won't reveal their true nature and identity; if they do so, it will be only because the target already knows and hasn't killed the Fallen One yet, or because playing the seductive big bad seems like the right tactic to use at the time.
- Calm: The Nephandus doesn't openly contact their cultists or targets... or, if they do, they're giving those parties small tidbits and gifts. This is the period where player characters might approach a Nephandus for information or help if they feel desperate enough to do so.
- Tensions Rising: The Nephandus has been thwarted with regard to her plans, or else is currently cycling up to create an elaborate ritual or some other complex scheme she cannot accomplish on her own. At this stage, the Fallen One puts all of her cultists, patsies, and allies on her project, and becomes difficult to reach. Attempts to interrupt her will go poorly, if not fatally (see below).
- Acute Violence: This is the Nephandus in her full power. She doesn't care who or what she destroys in order to meet her goals. Those closest to her are in the most danger because they're the ones who have the most value to her personally – and therefore, to her plans. She'll tear out hearts, shove people into the arms of her demonic allies, and generally engage in anything she can do in order to serve the will of the Self and the Absolute. Nothing else matters, except for perhaps the style and viciousness with which she can achieve her ends. If the player characters seek her destruction, they will likely encounter her in this state. If they're her allies, they may wind up on the altar or the rack or the electrified bedframe deep within her Labyrinth. This stage may also take place be if the Nephandus is on the run...at which point, she'll tear apart anything in her way in order to get to safety in the depths.

Honeymoon: After her ritual, or once she's finished fighting for her life, the Nephandus experiences a rush of emotions: exhilaration, relief, and confidence. This is when she rewards her associates with drugs, sex, affection, and other necessary vices. Naturally, she may still see them as weak or pathetic, but now she's willing to give them what they need in order to need her. Thanks to her love-bombing campaigns, her loved ones, cultists and sycophants will never, ever leave her without extraordinary effort on their part.

As glamorous as they seem, and as generous as they might seem, Nephandi are, at heart, nothing but predatory abusers. They may talk a great game about the Absolute and esoterica philosophies and all their many grand goals, but underneath it all they love the violence, the power, and the cruelty. Nephandi, like run-of-the-mill abusers, make others feel small so they don't have to. The glorious theories, however sincerely held they might be, are window dressings for an intensely broken and willful abuser.

# Playing Abuse

Nephandi may be abusers, but as a Storyteller or a player, you should not be. It is fine to play out a horror game, where the darkness closes in around your characters and smiles at them with silver teeth, but at the end of the day, as we've emphasized throughout this book, it is a game. If you are using your Mage: The Ascension game to punish, harass, or take your anger out on your players, please put down this book now and go do some introspection. At that point, you are not being a good player, running gritty horror, or adding verisimilitude to your game - you are being a jerk.

That having been said, engaging with Nephandi can be fun and intense in a sort of disgusting, under-the-skin, vulnerable sort of way. These mages and their allies embody a very specific sort of horror: a human with inhuman desires which turn out to be all-too human after all. Our ability to empathize with the Fallen makes them that much more dangerous; that empathy lets them in and then corrupts us, changing us making us more willing to accept the embrace of both the Caul and perhaps the real-life evils behind that symbol of cruelty.

As we've seen throughout this book, the Fallen practice and epitomize abuse. What might that sort of thing look like in your game?

#### **Emotional Abuse**

What it is: The preferred tool of adsinistrati, and of prelati who look to keep their cultists and subordinates under control, emotional abuse is difficult to recognize and even more difficult to prove. It starts out with snide remarks, denial of small affections, or patronizing "logical" explanations of subjective experiences. It escalates into gaslighting, blowups, and constant putdowns. The victim is told that he's stupid, ugly, and unlovable. The abuser targets every insecurity either party knows of. No one else can love or care about the victim as much as the abuser does — so if that victim dares to leave, where would he go? The words ensnare their victim as surely as any net or Forces Effect could do... and given the effectiveness of the tactics described in Chapter Two and the manipulative spells and Wonders presented in Chapter Five, those words really *are* the cruelest weapon they could use.

Peer pressure also constitutes a potent source of emotional abuse. An abuser can turn friends, peers, and family against the target (or simply threaten to do so), manipulate the victim's fears that "Nobody really likes you," or "They're all talking about you, you know," isolate the target socially either by driving their other relationships away or demanding the victim's constant presence away from other influences, or otherwise attack the target through their ties to society in general. Especially in the age of social media, an abuser can use this tactic from a distance, inflicting extraordinary harm without ever lifting a finger or conjuring a Sphere against them.

How to use it: Emotional abuse is a dangerous tool to use in a game based on theater of the mind. Emotionally abusing *characters* may lead to emotionally abusing *players* — and if your response is "Who cares?" then please see above.

In order to play out emotional abuse by a Nephandus, talk to the player beforehand. Work out boundaries and find out which subjects are untouchable. Do not target the player's insecurities. Instead, focus on the character and what that character fears worst about themselves. How would the Nephandus work herself inside the character's head? What would ensnare the character fastest, and open them up most to the curved knives and curved smiles of your Nephandic character?

#### Physical Abuse

What it is: This is probably what you think of when you hear the word "abuse." The obvious forms of violence — hitting, burning, fighting, and so forth — are all forms of physical abuse, but there are hundreds more. Unless the victim already craves violence, or else has been sufficiently worn down beforehand, physical abuse is the most likely way to alienate the target. People who'll apparently put up with anything can (and often do) fight back against or walk away immediately from someone who harms them physically. From a legal standpoint, physical abuse is also one of the only forms of domestic violence that can be prosecuted, so abusers may be careful to not leave bruises, lacerations, or scars. (Nephandi, of course, can heal such injuries without a trace — see the Chapter Five spell Beautify or Deform.)

Physical abuse may also involve restraints, uncomfortable postures or surroundings, sleep deprivation, forced dietary restrictions, or outright starvation, none of which leave immediately visible scars. While prolonged physical abuse is not an indicator of lethal intent, all murders by abusers can be considered physical abuse as well. It's an extension of that same selfish intent.

How to use it: Physical violence will likely be the easiest sort of abuse for your players to understand, since it involves

something like physical conflict. Nephandi, especially shaytans, may throw their subordinates around or torture their loved ones to prove their loyalty. Labyrinths and Cauls are dedicated to the glorification of agony and entropy, and characters inevitably encounter unreasonable amounts of physical abuse when dealing with the Fallen. Whether with magickal or mundane materials (often both), Nephandi cause destruction wherever they go. Sacrifices, ritual torture, sadistic non-ritual torture, and simple explosions of rage all factor into the typical week of most Fallen folk. As with all forms of abuse discussed in this section, discuss limits with your players beforehand. If a player says "No," then honor that.

As a note: If a Nephandus plans to keep someone around for a while, they'll likely promise training, enlightenment, or some other sort of gift in between the acts of physical abuse. The Fallen One may even make good on that promise, especially if she thinks it would be useful or fun. In religious and occult societies, physical abuse is often considered a tradition; "We hurt you because we care," you know, and enduring that punishment is considered to be an old-school badge of dedication. It's all a ploy, though, of course. Love-bombing (combined with a little bit of Mind magick, if the Nephandus isn't especially interested in the game of abuse and corruption itself) will keep almost anyone close at hand. Hope that the Nephandus won't do it again, that they've *changed*, can be a real bitch when you're the one who's trying to get away from her.

#### Sexual Abuse

What it is: Possibly the most important thing to note about sexual abuse is that it is not about sexual desire. It involves sexual actions, sure, and it can be romanticized by the abuser, the victim, and the people who surround them. (Fifty shades of blurred lines, you know.) Like all other forms of abuse, however, sexual abuse is about power and control. The abuser who molests his son wants the same thing as the abuser who gets his partner pregnant again, and again, and sabotages her birth control so he can do it again. Sex is a matter of honor and respect in many cultures, including Western ones, so abuse victims are less likely to report or even discuss sexual violation. Their abusers tell the victims that they're dirty, that they deserved the abuse, that they led the abuser on or secretly wanted and enjoyed it. Sexual abuse is often combined with emotional abuse to achieve this effect. Victims and survivors come to believe that maybe they did want it, that they are unworthy of love, and that all they really are is an object for someone else's pleasure.

How to use it: Do not use sexual abuse with other players unless you discuss in detail with them beforehand what's fair game and what's off limits. More so than almost any other type of abuse (with, perhaps, the exception of emotional abuse), sexual abuse in your game has the potential to traumatize a vulnerable player for real. Are there people who have been sexually abused at your gaming table? Chances are good that yes there are even if they don't talk about it with anyone else. Those survivors may feel like they can't discuss the abuse because they feel guilty or

ashamed that things were done that way. This is especially true if the abusers were (or still are) lovers, ex-lovers, family members, or authority figures. In that case, the person has almost certainly been shamed into silence. It's not your job to force the issue, and certainly not your right to do so in a game.

It's important to be open, honest, and consent-minded if you consider bringing sexual violence into your game in any way, let alone to do so with Nephandi who can magickally force a victim's body to respond, bend a person's emotions toward unwanted desires, or alter people's minds to that point where the victim remembers consenting to or enjoying the abuse. A Nephandus could use a Qlippothic approach to the Life Sphere in order to force an orgasm or a pregnancy. Forces and Correspondence allow an abuser to assault her target from a distance. A shaytan or adsinistratus might want to get up close and personal, though, and forego magick entirely in order to hone and enjoy his skills with erotic violation. Any and all of these assaults require direct communication between the Storyteller and the players, even something just as simple as stating, "I'm considering including sexual content in this game. What are your limits, and what would you like to be included or left out entirely?"

#### Religious or Spiritual Abuse

What it is: Either a subset of emotional and physical abuse, or an odd little set of abuse all its own, religious and spiritual abuse involves invoking the wrath of a higher power or the victim's spiritual society against the target. In the real world, where people don't have the power of gods and demons at their fingertips, this sort of abuse is often conducted through forced "baptisms" (drownings), starvation, cleansings of various orifices, ritualized genital mutilations, beatings, and marathons of forced prayer and fasting. The abuser may use stress positions, such as kneeling or prostration, to force the victim to comply. Peer pressure is an essential element of such abuse, too, with guilt, shame, and inferiority being showered upon that person by the society...in the name of their god, of course, and all for the victim's own good. Eventually, the victim comes to realize that he's bad, unworthy, or otherwise soiled in the eyes of his god and congregation. Pleasing the abuser is that person's only path to salvation – but unfortunately, the only thing that pleases the abuser is pain.

How to use it: Nephandi are masters of spiritual and religious abuse. Rituals they perform abuse their victims, offering their suffering to the Absolute, the Wyrm, or themselves. Malfeans, Gatekeepers, and members of the Golden Bull are especially noted for their use of spiritual abuse, though anyone who keeps a cult (as in the Background Trait of that name) practices such abuse to some degree. Also, despite popular conceptions, monotheistic creeds are not the only spiritual practices that abuse their people; that oh-so-tolerant pagan coven may host abusers of its own.

While religious and spiritual abuse are less common than the other types listed above, someone at your table may have been abused this way, and so it's important to check in about that beforehand. Unless the theme has been specifically requested by players, religious abuse should take the form of

Nephandic beliefs being inflicted on characters, and not as an abusive version of a creed someone at your table actively practices. No matter how you might feel personally about that creed, this is not the place for you to air your animosity towards a player's religion or spiritual heritage.

#### Financial Abuse

What it is: Cash rules everything around us...including ourselves. How well would you cope with it if someone locked down your accounts, took your money, refused to let you spend anything except for purchases they approved of, and prevented you from getting a job? Trapped, helpless, beholden to the person who holds your money? That's financial abuse. Control the money, control the person. While it can be an initial foray, a testing of the victim's boundaries, financial abuse is often combined with other forms of abuse in order to make it more difficult to leave.

Financial abuse is especially common in the business world, where employees (even executive ones) are paid either too little to get away and find a better job, or so much they cannot afford to quit unless they wish to lose everything they depend upon; the latter technique is even called a "golden handcuff," which makes it obvious that the people behind it know exactly what they're doing. In exchange, the "job creator" demands loyalty, long hours, obedience, immediate compliance with all demands, and the surrender of personal, family, and bodily autonomy whenever the employer wants to require such things. In an associated layer of emotional abuse, the employee is told to feel pride for belonging to "a tough-minded, hard-working" elite workforce. Financial dependence is standard business practice – one enhanced and exacerbated by politicians who are paid to keep things as they are. Although domestic purse strings constitute the most obvious form of financial abuse, employment often involves a more insidious one... and rich Nephandi, like those of the Mammonite sect, practice it a lot.

How to use it: Nephandi still have to live in this rude material world, and Sleepers are so easily controlled by a quick flash of money. Fallen cult leaders may squeeze their devotees for money. Decadenti either have their own fortunes, or else coerce financial support and indulgence from their lovers and sycophants. Mammonites, Goatkids, and HOBs convince gullible targets to part with cash in exchange for motivational speaking or mystical secrets. Gatekeepers worm funds out of subscribers on the internet. Do these abusers need that money for themselves? Unlikely, but it does help to have money to buy nice things... and it's yet another leash on the character in question. Add in a little Mind-Sphere magick, tweak the feelings of reward and release when someone gives you money, and bam, they're yours. Take that money away, or even threaten to remove a source of essential support, and the victim will do whatever you command.

As with all other forms of abuse, discuss this sort of thing with your players first. Especially with regards to workplace abuse and financial desperation, this technique might cut a little too close to home.

### Gray and Darker Gray

Sometimes, the story won't be as simple as dealing straight up with an abuser who hates you. The Nephandus on the block could be the Tradition mage you used to trust, but who disappeared several years ago; you thought they'd moved away, when in fact they'd been being trained toward the Nephandic Path through torture and unholy indulgence. Your friend may have adopted a child who has no aura and whose eyes burn red when exposed to the light. The kid earns straight As and is a brilliant soccer player, but you know better. That child should have never been brought out of the womb.

Many mages, when faced with hypothetical situations like these, would reply, "Put them through Gilgul" without a second thought. Nephandi are abominations, after all. They're living reminders that any mage can fall to hubris, even as the supposed good guys make excuses — "they were born bad, they're doomed to fall, you couldn't have stopped it" – for that brutal rush to judgement. The truth is, if the Nephandus had been caught early enough, their transformation through the Caul could have been stopped. Had someone noticed that person withdrawing, collecting infernalist texts, testing out particularly destructive spells and saying it was for "just for experimental purposes," the whole mess could have been avoided. Even Master mages, with all of their Time and Mind and Correspondence magicks, sometimes miss nascent Nephandi. More often than they'd like to admit, really. Maybe that's why they come down so hard on the Nephandi they do find.

It hurts even more when the Nephandus in question is someone your character knew. Maybe the Virtual Adept she learned advanced hacking from was actually a Gatekeeper, luring you towards the darkness of the Absolute. Maybe the cute person you took home from the bar was one of the Decadenti and is now using your affection to power a profane ritual. Nephandi are terrifying precisely because they are so *very* close to home. They could be any mage you know, given a bad-enough day and a lack of someone to see their pain before the final step begins.

In game terms, a Nephandus should test both the players and the characters. The players should find clever ways to outwit the Fallen One and her allies while still enjoying themselves and getting some good scares along the way. The characters, though, should find the experience terrifying, confusing, and frustrating. Nephandi and their companions reflect the worst elements of the player characters. These mages are hubris, selfishness, and rage wrapped up in a horrifyingly alluring package. The line that divides the player characters and the Nephandi is the Caul — and the players should know that even if their characters do not.

Make no mistake: The Nephandi are evil incarnate. But given the right trigger, anyone else could be that way, too.

#### Into the Caul

The Caul is the beginning and the end of a Nephandus, the mouth that chews up her soul and spits out something

# What About Widderslainte Kids?

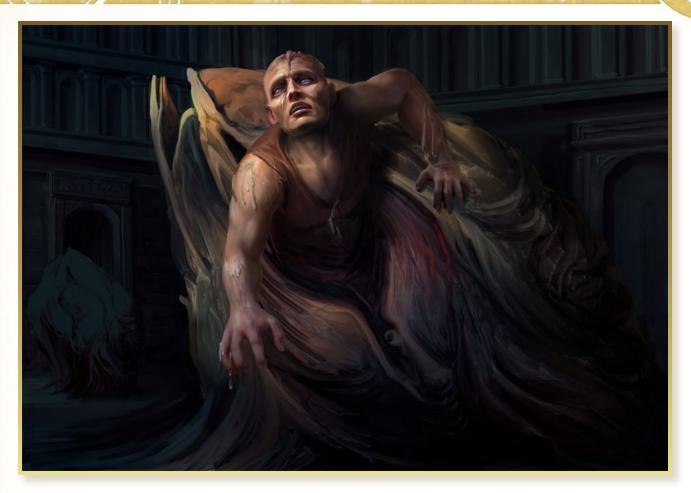
Astute readers will notice that there's only one mention of child-Nephandi in this entire section. The other widderslainte referenced are all adults. This is because, in the real world, children cannot abuse adults. Kids can be frustrating and even harmful, but do not have the power and ability to negotiate obligations that are necessary to be intentional abusers.

Many people who were abused as children remember being accused of abusing their abusers. Sometimes — as in the various cases where clergy, politicians, and celebrities abuse children — those children are blamed for "tempting" their abusers and accused of being sinful for having "enjoyed the attention." Such memories and condemnations confuse and traumatize us. We grow up believing that we're evil, and that we can't be anything other than evil unless we try really hard to be good. While young widderslainte may have the raw ability and desire to abuse adults, there's no reason to validate real-world adult abusers further here by going on about demon children and so forth. Yes, the devil-spawn archetype exists, but especially for people who truly were abused as kids, that archetype might be a step too far.

horrible, a non-Euclidean monster of transformed Avatar and tattered spirit. Every experience with a Caul, whether it involves creation, the beginning of a Descent, or simply meditation inside the Caul, is deeply personal. Cauls, as detailed earlier, are well hidden from casual sight, but easily accessed by the willing Nephandus or the unwilling prisoner.

A chapter or session involving entering or experiencing a Caul is not a casual undertaking. Cauls epitomize every horror of the Nephandic Descent made manifest: cruelty, violation, and desolation all in a very small, very violent, very distant space. Whether or not the character winds up inside of one (and remember that an unwilling trip into a Caul is an extremely unpleasant one-way experience) an encounter with a Caul is seriously awful business. Cracking jokes and checking cell phones during such a scene robs it of its importance within the world of Mage.

If you're a Storyteller and decide to run a Caul scene for a player — either because their character got tossed into one, or else entered one willingly and will be working against the rest of their circle — take that player aside. Ask what *they* want out of the scene, and how they expect to respond to it. Ask what sorts of experiences would make the character believe that person has no choice but to accept the Descent — and then ask what the player would prefer to keep out of such a scene. How does your player want to resolve the scene? With a gruesome death? With transformation into the worst aspects of that character's self?



The Caul, again, is a deeply personal experience. If the other player characters plan to destroy the Caul, and the player of the character inside of it wants her character to die a martyr's death (or perhaps actually become a Nephandus), it's important to calibrate the scene so that no one's expectations, within reason, get spoiled. And although a Caul should feel personal, it should target the mage as a character, not the player as a person.

Do not, if you can help it, run another scene in a chapter where a Caul appears. The Caul is meant to be exquisitely terrifying. Anyone who deals with such a thing, on any level, should feel exhausted and afraid. These Abyssal portals embody an obscene inversion of everything that seems right about the world. They are blasphemous even to people who don't believe in gods because, as Lovecraft put it, they are "Things Which Should Not Be" but which exist anyway...

Don't take them lightly, is what we're saying here.

If you're a player in a Caul scene? Please don't spoil that scene for your fellow players (the Storyteller included) by treating it like a joke. If it's your character who winds up going into a Caul, then be honest with your Storyteller and your fellow players about what you want, what you don't want, and what your limits are. Few things around a gaming table hurt worse than the resentment that pops up when a Storyteller or fellow player repeatedly hits buttons they didn't know you had.

# Going Smoothly into the Darkness

For the most part, we've covered the overall responsibilities a Storyteller has within their Mage chronicle. Mage 20, Chapter Seven, goes into detail about those matters, especially in the sections "The Game's the Thing," "Setting the Space," and "Triggers, Limits, and Boundaries" (pp. 342-349). Even so, the Fallen provide special challenges to a group and its Storyteller, and so it's worth addressing a few things that can make things go more smoothly when Nephandi rear their ugly little heads in your game:

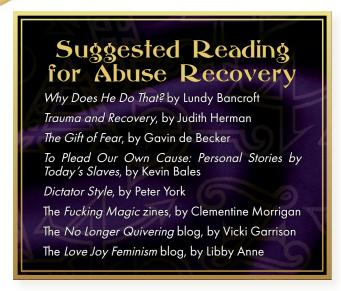
## Storyteller Responsibilities

Provide a Safe Space

**Mage:** The Ascension, no matter how many Nephandi you throw into your game, is just that: *a game*. Your players should feel comfortable playing with you, knowing that you won't push them beyond what they want to handle.

#### Mediate Player Expectations

Some players want a light game about exploring magic, with an occasional foray into darkness and despair. Others want high-impact play, wherein they wind up questioning themselves, their choices, and the world around them at every



turn. Many players want a mix of the two, and a few want something else altogether. These are all valid play styles, but sometimes they don't work well together. It's your job to make sure that no one's play style is running over someone else's fun in a harmful way. Sometimes friends can't play together, and that's nothing to be ashamed of. If you need to divide or recalibrate a group, then do it. Your game will be better for everyone if you do.

#### Provide an Ear

You are consensually inflicting these engaging horrors on your players. You are toying with their emotions, with their permission. Thus, it is common courtesy to help them get back to a safe mental place before they leave your table. Aftercare is important, so be willing to listen to emotions and talk about characters if necessary. Some players won't need aftercare, some will need it more than others.

#### Know Your Own Boundaries and Enforce Them

Some players might call you at midnight about a scene. Others will make you guess their boundaries and emotions. Know your limits, and then decide what you're willing to put up with. Unless you are somehow being paid to give therapy and be a punching bag for your players (and if you are, trust me, they're not paying you enough), you only owe them only as much time as you are willing to give. Do not let your players

convince you that you are their only support system and so they have a right to destroy you outside of game. You're not, and they do not.

# Player Responsibilities

Be Honest with Your Fellow Players and Storyteller

While your Mage characters might be psychic, your Storyteller and fellow players are not. Your friends know you, but they might not know what your own triggers and traumas are. (Trust us, you have them — we all do.) Tell your tablemates what's acceptable for you and what's not, and then be willing to work toward a safe middle ground for the group as a whole. Refusing to communicate just breeds resentment and a toxic gaming space. That's a no-win situation for everyone involved.

#### Respect the Boundaries at the Table

Even when you're at not the table, respect the boundaries of your fellow players and Storyteller. Don't make jokes that ruin a player's intense scene, and don't belittle other peoples' limits. If you feel that you need to talk to the Storyteller outside of game, then set up a time to do so and don't blow up their phone or inbox with messages demanding their emotional labor. Unless you are paying them to be your therapist and punching bag, they do not owe you any time beyond what they are willing and able to give.

#### Do Not Mistake Your Game for Therapy

While Mage: The Ascension can be extremely therapeutic, gaming is no replacement for a trained professional who can help you work through confusing feelings or problematic memories. Please seek appropriate help if you need it; your gaming group is not your only support system, and your friends are not your therapists even if they do work as therapists when they're not enjoying themselves with a game.

### Enjoy Yourself

This is a game, right? Regardless of whether you're the Storyteller or a standard player, if you're playing the game, then play because you like it, not because it's a second job. If you don't like it, stop playing. There will be more games and other groups. While your presence is valued, it is not a matter of life-or-death. Do what makes you comfortable. It's just a game.

# Nephandi as Protagonists

The question never goes away: "Should my players be able to run Nephandic characters?" That threat of potential damnation adds a keen sense of drama to a chronicle, after all, and if there's no chance a player's character *could* Fall, then don't the Eaters of the Weak remain an abstract threat, not a personal one?

Really, the answer should be no. As far as we're concerned, Nephandi are everything a roleplayer should never bring to

the table. (See Mage 20, p. 224), While arguments have been made (rather vehemently) in favor of the dramatic roleplaying potential of Dark Enlightenment abusers, it's the firm position of this book and its authors that the option should be off the table.

But what if you and your players want to do it anyway? First off, don't blame us for the mess.

## Building the Beast

Each Nephandus is unique. Although their enemies envision the Fallen Ones as a faceless horde of evil cultists, Nephandi are as individualistic as any other sort of mage can be. Hell, given the competitive, secretive, and often unsociable nature of this faction, they tend to be even more distinct from one another than Tradition mages are, and far more so than Technocratic operatives. Really, the most unifying traits the Eaters of the Weak possess involve the Qlippoth (which many of them view differently), the ideals of Descent (which, again, vary), and their dedication to corruption, predation, cruelty, and their ability to get away with it all (which depend plenty upon personal circumstances).

Thus, when creating Nephandic characters, treat each one as a person in their own right, with individual needs, wants, desires, beliefs, and weaknesses. Although you don't need to answer every question on the list below, knowing at least a few of those answers will make each Nephandus memorable on that mage's own terms.

#### **Character Questions**

- Impression: How does the Nephandus come across (appearance, personality, fashion, attitude, voice, etc.)?
- Identity: How does this character identify in terms of sex, gender, ethnicity, social class, social circle, and so forth?
- Sect: Which Nephandic sect does this Fallen One belong to, and why?
- Traits: Which game Traits are exceptional (high or low)?
- Motivations: What does this person desire? (See below as well.)
- **Abuse:** What did this person suffer before their Fall?
- Strengths: What makes this magus powerful?
- Weaknesses: Where are their vulnerabilities?
- Conflicts: What stood in this Fallen One's way before the player characters showed up? How does this person handle things and people that get in their way?
- Allies: Who are the mage's pawns, associates, and companions?
- Targets: Who's in this mage's sights, and why?
- Victims: Which sorts of people does this Nephandus prefer to corrupt and destroy, and why?
- Territory: What places does the Nephandus call home, how often would you find them there, and what might happen if those places were threatened, harmed or exposed?
- Labyrinth or Cabal: Does this mage belong to one? If so, who and where are they?

If you really want to pursue this option, however, here are some suggestions:

#### If You Plan to Do It, Then Do It Seriously:

There's an old tradition in RPGs where players create the evilest characters they can imagine, and then run around killing shit while the ST pulls his hair out and wishes he was dead.

Don't do that. Really, don't.

If you decide to play a character who may Fall or has already done so (and if you, as the Storyteller, decide to allow it), then take that decision seriously. Don't be an asshole. Instead, ask yourself, "What does my character gain or lose by embracing the ultimate Void?" What traumas drove him to this point, can he ever transcend them, and if so, how? Realize that you, in this case, are choosing to become a vicarious abuser who has probably been abused himself. If he hasn't Fallen yet—perhaps despite an Avatar urging him to do so—there's heroic tension

involved in refusing to take that plunge. If the plunge is already in session, the tension moves to *how far* too far goes. Will he balk at hurting loved ones? Kids? A dog? In a Path dedicated to crushing taboos, are there still taboos this Fallen One won't break...and if there are, what happens when he's face to face with them? A serious treatment of Nephandic characters can help overturn the old stereotype, and let dramatic possibilities overrule the urge to be a total dick.

For more guidance, see the preceding section "Building the Beast," and "Roleplaying a Nephandus" in **The Book of Secrets**, p. 241.

#### Realize Things Will Go Sideways Fast

The trouble with evil player characters is that they sabotage an RPG simply by existing in it. By definition, an intentionally evil character (as opposed to a character who commits evil acts by omission, recklessness, or simply being the sort of archetypal amoral fighter who inhabits most RPGs) is someone who has decided that it's his prerogative to fuck people over. As kind and loving as he might seem — even, perhaps, might intend

#### Metaphysical Questions Awakening: What was it like? Avatar: How does this mage perceive their Avatar? Origin: Caul-born, barabbus, or widderslainte? Focus: How does this mage approach magickal paradigm, practice, and instruments? **Spellcraft:** What sorts of spells, rites, etc. does this mage often use? Qlippoth: How does this mage perceive the Qlippoth? Accomplishment: How far into the Qlippoth have they gone? Descent: Personal? Global? Both? Why? Resonance and Paradox: How do those elements manifest when things go poorly for the mage? **Background and Motivation Questions** Who was this person before they Fell? Why did they Fall? What do they hope to get out of having done it? What's their attitude and approach to predation? Why is this Nephandus cruel, and how do they reveal it? What forms of manipulation and corruption does this mage prefer? How has this Nephandus avoided being discovered and destroyed? What and who (if anyone) does this person cherish? What might the Nephandus do if that cherished thing or person is harmed?

to be — that evil character is a train wreck waiting to happen. As the scorpion said while stinging to death the frog that was carrying him across a lake, it's just his nature.

#### When Things go Sideways, Fade to Black

As entertaining as it might sound to roleplay out your character eviscerating children in Mammon's name, that sort of thing can be seriously disturbing to the other folks at the table. Thus, if you — as the player or the Storyteller — are pushing the limits of what your fellow players enjoy, then fade to black and let imaginations do what they do best.

#### Keep an Eye on Your Fellow Players

Reading the room is an essential skill for any sort of entertainment. Listen for tones of voice, odd looks, or heavy silences that suggest that your fellow players are not along for the ride. Watch the reactions of your fellow players when things get nasty; if people seem offended, upset, or otherwise uncomfortable, then again — fade to black or do an outright *Blackout* (as per Mage 20, p. 345). It's generally best to do this yourself; if someone else has to do it for you, there will probably be hard feelings around the table whether folks articulate them or not.

#### Limit the Power Level

Many gamers love decking their characters out with shiny new powers. Unless you, as the Storyteller, plan to run a game where one or more players raze your setting to the ground, then disallow certain powers, limit their effectiveness, and make players sweat to get the ones they obtain. The primary limiting factors to Nephandi involve small numbers, awful fates, and the low profile they must keep because everybody hates their guts. Because it's harder (though not impossible) to maintain those limits when the Nephandus is a player character, the Storyteller must be extra vigilant about power-creep unless she's ready to throw in the towel on her game.

#### Remember that Evil has Consequences

So, about those primary limiting factors... Nephandi tend to live short, terrible lives. The ones who don't learn to be clever wind up dead. Every faction, even those they might secretly dominate, has an official no-mercy policy on them; if Fallen mages really have achieved upper-tier control of the Technocracy or Traditions, they're not going to want competition from some asshole upstart anyway, so the usual shoot-on-sight orders still apply. Don't even think about palling around with werewolves, because anything other than a Black Spiral Dancer will attempt to kill a Nephandus the moment they sense the Wyrmspawn in their midst. Vampires, of course, will see the dark mage as a

threat, and would-be immortals aren't big about letting threats to their unlives go unpunished. A Nephandus who acts like the average RPG character would be hunted by every paranormal faction in the vicinity within a session or two, and the mortal authorities won't let things slide either. Add to that situation Paradox, Resonance, rival mages, demonic entities, damnation pacts that soon come due, and the intense psychic and emotional strain of being *just that evil*, and you'll see how the consequences for a Fallen character really aren't much fun at all.

#### **Enforce Consequences**

As a Storyteller, make those consequences stick. Bring on the cops, grieving loved ones, witch-hunters, and rival mages. Make your Nephandi fear exposure. The defiant pride expressed in Chapter One is a smokescreen for the fear of what inevitably happens once a Fallen mage gets caught being what he truly is.

#### Favor Tragedy over Farce

If all else fails, remember Elric: Evil, heroic, tragic, miserable, and ultimately dead at the hands of his own sword after destroying everyone and everything he ever loved. Sure, he was cool in a world-ending sort of way, but that saga draped a terrible burden on the character. For a player with the right mindset, that sort of thing might actually be fun to play. A really good one could even make a memorable story of it. No matter how carefree a given Nephandus might seem on the surface, that life is hard and awful, and it probably ends very badly. Check out the suggestions about tragedy in **The Book of Secrets** (pp. 285-286), and if the player seems to want a brutal power fantasy without the drastic burdens of a Fallen life, then just refuse to allow that character at all and, if necessary, quickly and messily kill them off.

#### Be Ready for People to Get Pissed Off at You

If you're the player who wants to run a Fallen mage, then accept that your tablemates are likely to get upset with the things you and your character do. If you're the Storyteller who allows a Nephandus, then realize the player will likely get upset at you when you impose limits and consequences on what she does. Either way, the character will wind up hated, hunted, and eventually damned by other characters in the story. The Eaters of the Weak are not in the friendship business. To them, everyone is a hunter, a rival, a pawn, or prey.

#### Pay Attention to Yourself

If this idea still sounds like fun, then ask yourself what's enjoyable about it. It's perfectly acceptable to crave catharsis for your real life in a fantasy game; gods know I've done that, and Nephandi seem like ideal vehicles for bloody good catharsis. The troubling thing about them is this: They're too real. Yes, the Fallen are fictional wizards in an imaginary



landscape, but the abuses they perform and the crimes they commit are, unless you're talking about flamboyant magickal Effects, real abuses and real crimes with real victims and real long-term damage.

If you really want to act that sort of thing out, why?

If after reading this book, playing a Nephandus appeals to you, ask yourself why. The answers might be more important than you think.

And if it begins to seem, to yourself or others, like the things you're exploring and revealing are unhealthy and abusive, then please quit playing that character.

The presence of a Nephandus in a Mage game sets up situations where characters are going to wind up badly harmed, dead, or much worse. If that Nephandus is a player character as well, the damage will feel personal to the players involved. Roleplaying provides a fictional extension of our real selves, and so even when we understand the lines that divide our vicarious atrocities from real-life trauma, the things we experience through our characters and stories still connect with us in strange and often surprising ways. In the case of the Fallen, those surprises can get nasty. The best way to avoid them is to make the line as firm as possible by limiting these abusive monsters to the Storyteller's domain.

# Can Nephandi be Redeemed?

That's another big question: Can someone who has done the awful things they do, who accepts the malevolent paradigms and deeds behind Nephandic Arts, whose soul has literally Fallen into the Abyss and transformed in an essential way find salvation, even in a setting where hope and empowerment are the strongest themes in the game?

That, as the Storyteller, is your call.

The dominant view of Nephandi is that they're beyond redemption. If it's possible, then, for a Fallen One to find salvation, then that salvation will be hard to find, epic to secure, and inevitably fatal to obtain. There's no magic cure for the Fall, and most Nephandi wouldn't want one anyway. No combination of Spheres can undo the Caul's effects, and even if a god *could* fix such damnation why would most gods even bother to try? Redemption is a heroic goal, but the Fallen

aren't heroes in that sense. Although the saga of a widderslainte struggling to shed apparent destiny could provide amazing tragedy, the struggle loses its power if Descent is easily undone.

If such a thing is possible, then it's going to be a long, hard road away from Leviathan's brood. Other Nephandi will, of course, declare war on the turncoat, and other mages won't turn a blind eye now that the Fallen One has suddenly decided to become a nice guy. An inverted Avatar will rage, demonic Patrons will hunt, and former pawns and allies will seek revenge for the things that Nephandus has done to them. Redemption won't be a matter of turning over a new leaf and denouncing old behaviors. If a Fallen One can be redeemed, the cost will be high, and it will include her life. This is not a Path one walks away from and survives. Whatever fate a Nephandus meets, the life she led will end one day – perhaps with salvation, probably with damnation, maybe even in the state of the Black Diamond where she becomes one with the Abyss, but never as an ex-Nephandus mage. The road, once forsaken, is closed forever in this life, and possibly for other lives as well.

# Nephandic Metaplot Options



Mage 20 is metaplot-neutral. Many things *could* happen, but few things are set in stone and mandated for your game. Although Mage 20 sourcebooks place a heavy emphasis on the Fallen, you and your group are under no obligation to have Nephandi pop up everywhere and give your characters a hard time.

That said...

#### At War with Satan

In the simplest and most innocuous approach to Nephandi in our era, the Fallen are a contentious bunch of throwbacks at odds with one another. Having lost their connection to Otherworldly masters during the Avatar Storm and Great Maelstrom, these pitiful survivors now war among themselves, scrabbling for new sources of power and coherence. Malfeans, Infernalists, and mad K'laashaa cultists struggle for dominion amidst the ruins of their former dark majesty. This option assumes that the Technocracy holds the majority share of Consensus Reality, with the ravaged Fallen gutted by the loss of demonic patrons, Umbral Realms, and their most accomplished members, whose uncanny nature had exiled them beyond the Gauntlet and Horizon. Does this mean, then, that the Fallen have lost? Not even close.

From their earliest days, the Eaters of the Weak have been subtle, resourceful, and open to all advantages. While the old demon priests fling increasingly ineffective spells at one another, their younger counterparts have adapted to the Information Age. Meanwhile, the surge in pop-culture occultism has given them a whole new road of influence, and

the global trade of blood and materials provides an endless assortment of victims who, in this world, will rarely if ever be missed. Thus, the younger generation has eaten away at the power of the old guard until the exiled Nephandi find themselves locked out of their old home. Earth's dark corners are under new management now, and your player characters — regardless of their faction — could find themselves in a turf war between powerful yet monstrous Paradox magnets and their sly and wealthy rivals who've ditched diabolical traditions and turned technology to their advantage.

This metaplot option could involve Tradition mages, Technocracy operatives, Disparate malcontents, or other unaligned willworkers who get approached by mysterious benefactors who warn them of a Nephandic plot. These informants have actionable intel, and their efforts reveal a clear and present danger coming from a Fallen group. Of course, the informants are themselves Nephandi from the rival group, deploying the player characters as cannon fodder while concealing their own loyalty in the process. It's old-school devil mages versus sleek young predators, with the players in the middle and immanent catastrophe at every turn. Once the fight is joined, it's fast and brutal high-stakes war; and when the players discover they've been played, that war switches to two fronts, with the players in the middle of a fight that may itself have been a ruse to draw them in and wipe them out.

### The Fallen Technocracy

Extremity breeds abuse, and the Technocratic Union has never, despite its virtues, been especially moderate. The atrocities attributed to agents of the Technocracy could easily reflect a deep and awful rot of the Inner Circle...a rot that

## Intimate, not Epic?

The Fallen don't have to be trying to end the world. If you want a more down-to-earth storyline, a Nephandic character or cult can provide intimate challenges without reality wars. Temptation, abuse, attempted salvation, and the battle to save a soul from Falling are all perfect opportunities to stow the fireworks and emphasize the human side of Mage.

The "Genre, Storytelling, and Mage" section in **The Book of Secrets** (pp. 272-286) features dozens of potential themes, characters, and ideas that work as well, if not better, with a Nephandic character or two involved. Forbidden romance with a Fallen paramour? The horror of being trapped by Nephandic cannibals? The tragedy of widderslainte heritage? A barabbus supervillain, like Killgrave from Jessica Jones? Awakened cops vs. a Pipers slave network? A science-fiction thriller set in the Deep Umbra, with a Fallen stowaway on an Ethership or a Void craft? Hell, you could even — if you're feeling brave — attempt a satirical farce with Nephandi at its heart; that's bound to be a pretty black comedy, but given the Fallen presence within the corporate world, it's not inconceivable to have a grim take on The Office, or an American Psycho whose murderous impulses are real, magickal, and far more deadly.

Even without Nephandic characters on the stage, the various cults and corporations the Fallen command provide endless opportunities for small-scale stories with high-stakes potential. Maybe a player character's day job is run by a boss from the Golden Bull; or a Piper has snatched someone close to the players, or they discover a trafficked person nearby, or a new companion bears the scars of slavery at the Pipers' hands. The Decadenti are always good for a party, and they have a nasty habit of running people just for fun. God's Hammer doesn't only operate overseas, and if a character's best friend scores a mercenary job with the Hammer the players might find things about their friend's new gig that no one in their right mind would want in their home. Fascist clothing brands and mass-produced grimoires help keep the Fallen close at hand. Even without world-threatening pyrotechnics, the Eaters of the Weak hold influence everywhere.

For additional inspiration, see the sidebar "The Epic and the Intimate" in **Mage 20**, (p. 350), and the **Gods & Monsters** sourcebook, especially Chapters One, Two, and Five.

may have been present all along. In this case, the Fallen run the Technocracy in a top-down system of extreme corruption. The lower ranks remain largely unaware of this infection, yet they follow and obey an abusive system that's dedicated to wiping out rivals while keeping idealistic Technocrats at heel.

This domination may be centuries old, dating from the Renaissance voyages into the Void and the seductive lure of colonial wealth and trade. Or it might have come about more recently, when the imperialistic frenzy of European nations soaked the Daedalean ideals in blood. It probably had a lot to do with the Victorian-era purge of Craftmasons and Gabrielites, and it was certainly in place (if it was in place at all) during the global carnage of two world wars and hundreds of lesser yet appalling atrocities. The antisemitic elements of the Technocratic Pogrom, the mechanized bloodbath of WWI, the industrial genocides throughout the 20th century...they all make sense if the Fallen were at the helm the whole time. Certainly, the brutality of MECHA and Null-B, the tortures of Room 101, the slaughter of rival mages, and extravagant weapons like the HIT Mark and the Cyber-Tooth Tiger all seem more like the work of Fallen puppet masters than of a Union dedicated to advanced technology and the protection of humanity. The Technocracy's excesses point toward malign influence at the highest levels. The Union doesn't have to be Nephandic in your chronicle, but things certainly make a lot more sense if it is.

Previous editions of Mage feature several story hooks based in a covert war between Technocratic idealists and their Fallen overseers. Mage 20's rulebook and The Book of Secrets imply but do not mandate an internal war for the Union's heart. John Courage and Lee Ann Millner have been pursuing the truth behind that possibility for years, and the deeper they get, the more serious the consequences of that investigation might be. Chapter Four in The Book of Secrets, meanwhile, details the risks of defiance and the high cost of Union justice.

From a chronicle standpoint, a Fallen Technocracy storyline could feature Technocratic loyalists striving to purge the Inner Circle and its operatives of corruption; Tradition mages who realize that "the soulless Mirrorshades" are actually the steel fist of the Fallen Ones; Craft mages who—as noted in the Disparate Alliance section of the Mage 20 rulebook—already know about the infiltration and try to either destroy the Technocracy, recruit help, or set the Union against itself so as to kill both vultures with the same bloody stone. Any of those options will work, and a combination of them all, featuring Technocratic loyalists, Tradition mages, and Disparate allies forging an awkward truce in order to fight their common enemy.

Regardless of the approach you use, a Fallen Technocracy metaplot could range from intimate paranoia and high-stakes spy work to the wild joy of Cyber-Tooth Tigers tearing through demonic hordes. Whatever method you prefer, such conflicts will have huge repercussions on the world of **Mage**, especially if...probably when...the Technocracy itself implodes.

#### The Fallen Council

What if the Technocracy has been right all along? What if the good-guy wizards from the Council of Traditions are, in fact, Fallen maniacs pushing the world toward an archaic nightmare where they rule humanity again? Think about it for a moment: Would you want to live in a world where feeding blood to trees seemed like an alternative to air conditioning? Who handed

metaphysical licenses to kill out to Kali cultists and six-armed psychopaths who are supposed to mysteriously know who should live and who should die? Viewed objectively, the Traditions are ludicrous, and the world they're fighting for would be a nightmare for everyone except themselves. Their so-called "Ascension War," then, could be a smokescreen for nihilistic chaos — not a new "Mythic Age" but a new and awful Dark Age. In that light, the Technocracy's ruthlessness seems justified.

As with the Union, the rot may have set in early on. Perhaps the Council was founded by Nephandic puppets or Fallen wizards. Maybe the years before the Daedaleans arose really were as bad as legends say — baby-eating witches, devil-dealing sorcerers, alchemists in league with Satan while blood-crazed pagans danced with demons in the hills. Perhaps the Fallen ruled the Council all along, and the "gee-whiz" façade of the Council mages masks an urge to return to those monster-haunted nights, where sorcery ruled humankind and the best thing a "sleeper" could wish for involved evading the Satanic hordes.

Or perhaps the Nephandi came in later, during the desperate centuries where European empires burnt witches in the streets while conquerors butchered continents in the name of cotton, sugar, gold, and steel. A drowning man, they say, isn't picky about whose hand he takes, and so maybe the Eaters of the Weak cut a deal with the Traditions: We help you, and you help us.

It could be that the Council itself remained clean but Tradition Archmages held corruption close to their hearts. That would explain volumes about Doissetep's bloody history, tangled politics, and eventual self-destruction. Horizon, from certain perspectives, was a slave state, after all, maintaining medieval hierarchies while the Sleepers craved revolution and innovation. (Anyone who thinks that rule by "enlightened masters" is a pleasant thing should read up on the history of Tibet.) Maybe the occult surge of the Victorian era, or the atrocities of two World Wars, brought the Fallen to the Council door. Or the Massassa War let Fallen infiltrators step in and take over. Whether the contagion set in later on or was there from the very beginning, the idea that the Traditions are, in fact, Nephandic in leadership if not totality puts a whole new spin on Mage.

Once again, the Fallen Council metaplot option suggests honest mystics trying to root out their elders' corruption; or Technocracy agents who know damn well that those damn Superstitionists are trying to lead the world back into hell; or Disparate mages realizing (if they hadn't known it all along) that the Council is evil at heart. Perhaps the Hollow Ones' refusal to join the Traditions had less to do with being insultingly called stupid goth kids, and more to do with realizing how corrupt the Council really is; the "Hollow Treachery!" metaplot option (Mage 20, p. 201) makes a harrowing world of sense if it turns out the ambassador discovered and escaped the Nephandic rulers at Horizon's core. In a combination game, characters from all three factions could band together, perhaps to storm the ruins of Horizon or Doissetep and battle the Fallen shade

of Archmaster Porthos or other "kind old wizards" whose virtue was a front for soul-deep malaise.

#### The Division Bell

And then there's Mage 20's wild card: The Disparate Alliance, whose unified survival defies the Traditions and Technocracy and might prove to be a thorn in the side...or in the knife in the back...for one or both. According to their entry in Mage 20, the Alliance was founded on the belief that the Technocratic Union is most likely ruled by the Eaters of the Weak. Banding together for mutual protection, the Crafts have decided to hide when they can and strike when they dare. Given the secret strengths within the Crafts (see The Book of Secrets, pp. 237-240), the Alliance may be more formidable than anyone believes.

For an especially precarious chronicle, it could turn out that both the Traditions *and* the Technocracy are secretly corrupt. The Alliance winds up on their bad side, and maybe learns the hard way that the so-called "Ascension War" has actually been a ruse aimed at destabilizing reality and destroying the world. The game becomes a gauntlet run, with your players in the role of the gang in Walter Hill's film *The Warriors*, dodging flamboyant attempts to wipe them out and seeking refuge while outnumbered and outgunned.

On the other hand, maybe the *Alliance* is corrupt, founded by Fallen Batini as leverage to dislodge the Consensus and pitch the whole world into chaos. Whatever way things go, the unstable interplay between covert sorcerers is a perfect playground for a Nephandic endgame.

#### A World Gone to Hell

And there it is: The endgame. The Fallen have tilted our world off its axis, and Those Who Dwell Behind the Stars begin to close in on a quickly darkening world. This option brings the Reckoning to earth. Whether by Red Stars or vampire gods or rampant Wyrms or ghostly storms, the world as we know it today has died.

From a Storyteller standpoint, this is a bold move with no takebacks. The player characters will probably lose, and the world will burn whether they do or not. The "Environmental Hazards" section of Mage 20 (p. 359 and pp. 435-444) will come in handy, and the surroundings will be at least as dangerous as any Fallen mage. People — lots of people! — will need help, too. There won't be a moment to draw a quiet breath once this metaplot kicks in, and no matter what your players do, their reality will be forever changed.

#### **ELE**

Since the turn of the last millennium, the Western world has remained fixated on a never-ending Apocalypse: *Left Behind, The Hot Zone*, Y2K, 9/11, the War on Terror, global jihad, Rapture cults, nuclear panics, Mayan prophecies, zombie apocalypses, 2012, Ebola, asteroids, global climate change,

the blood moon... Every year or so brings a new doomsday countdown, yet humanity soldiers on in spite of ourselves. Even if the Reckoning metaplot kicked in and the Red Star arced across the skies, Mage 20 assumes we're all still here.

But not for lack of trying.

An ascendant sect within the Fallen is determined to bring the End Times about. The Exies (detailed in Chapter Three) hold a dedication to extinction-level events that many of their comrades don't seem to share. Time and time again, they release plagues, poisons, zombies, fires, natural disasters, asteroid strikes... if we can imagine it, they try to bring it about. So far, they haven't succeeded yet, due in part to other Fallen Ones who aren't ready to stop the party...or to let someone else share the credit for stopping it, anyway. They're a dedicated bunch, however, and so the would-be End Times keep coming.

Maybe one has started to succeed. A pandemic with no apparent cure burns across the globe; those damn zombies really *have* begun to rise; there's an asteroid headed our way and Sleeper governments are too disorganized or incompetent to stop it. Whatever the cause might be, the player characters have either discovered a plot to trigger this ELE, have spotted the beginning of the end, or find themselves caught up in an effort to stem the destruction before it consumes our world.

Cooperation is essential; squabbles mean the Exies win. A tale of this sort could bring enemies together in order to prevent the ELE. Technocrats, Traditionalists, Disparates, orphans, maybe even a Marauder or two... hell, this sort of situation might be the only thing that would convince members of the other factions to not kill a Nephandus on sight if that Fallen One held the key to preventing humanity's end. This sort of truce will be short-lived and exceedingly tense, with a Damoclean sword tied to a ticking clock right above the players' heads. (See "When This Ends, You're Dead!" in Mage 20, p. 253.) Still, a pending ELE, or an apocalypse in progress, would be an ideal way to bring together characters who would otherwise rather drink sewage than talk to one another.

The stakes, clearly, will be sky high. Retreat is not an option, and hesitation costs hundreds of lives per moment. For Storytellers with a taste for epic drama, this metaplot provides potential resents of the setting, too, thanks to the damage caused by the ELE. In any case, ELE should provide a potent threat with lasting effects. Unless the players manage to stop the plot before it enters its final phase, your setting will be changed, perhaps forever, by this Nephandic campaign. Humanity has a death wish, and the Fallen are happy to oblige.

#### Those Who Dwell Behind the Stars

The stars are finally right. Gateways open that should eternally remain closed. Those Who Dwell Behind the Stars, those mythic god-eaters reputed to occupy the deepest reached of the Void, have finally come home. Our cosmos trembles, and the earth is doomed.

Now what?

A Storyteller who wants to take Lovecraft at his word should be ready to play fast and loose with the rules for this one. Those Who Dwell Behind the Stars are beyond game stats, with powers on a cosmic scale. Although they may have been mortals once, the Black Diamond and the Consummation of Leviathan have transformed them into gods of a new and unbeatable kind. Encounters with such things are not dice-rolling contests—they're natural disasters on a world-ending scale. Atmosphere, not combat, will set the tone for this metaplot, and that atmosphere must be bleak, surreal, and covering a wide spectrum of fears.

Unless your characters possess titanic powers, they're gonna lose this one. A *deus ex machina* solution might exist, but that feels like a cop-out when things reach this extremity. More likely, you'll be running a survival scenario, with the heroes trying to save whomever they can reach in whatever ways they can. Even in that growing horror, though, there may be hope — hope for escape to another universe, or to preserve something precious in a world of everlasting night.

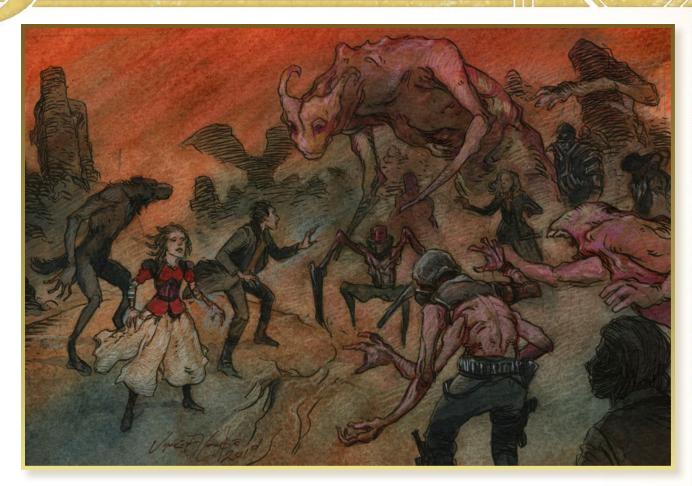
#### The Hungry God

Basilisk awakens, and it wants lunch. Across the Digital Web, whole sectors disappear. Netizens become an endangered species, with folks disappearing from behind computers and cell phones in the mortal world as well. The meme-bred messiah of extinction reaches out to consume the world that conceived it. The players might be able to halt its rampage, but gods feed on attention and they do not go down easily.

Chapter Six features an embryonic Basilisk (see p. XX); by the time this scenario arrives, though, the entity will have attained god-form status and become a force of nature, not of Traits. As with Those Who Dwell Behind the Stars, Basilisk at this level manifests as atmospheric quirks: disappearing people, huge toothmarks in walls and furniture, gleaming scales in the clouds above, and rumbles in the earth and seas. Although it might take on a Godzilla-like role in this story, it'd be more effective to let Basilisk simply make things vanish. A town that disappears, after all, is more unnerving than one flattened by a kaiju refugee.

Players in this situation will face two enemies: Basilisk itself, and the Fallen cult that conjured it. Those Nephandi won't let rivals shut their program down, and a running battle of memes and counter-memes, hacking and countering (see **The Book of Secrets**, pp. 116-127), social intrigue and open violence could spill from the mortal realm to the Digital Web and back again. As Basilisk's power grows, the urgency to stop the hungry god intensifies. Meanwhile, people disappear, computer networks go offline, and the internet might flicker, stutter, or utterly shut down.

This option depends on the hazy space where virtual and material realities collide. A Storyteller who runs with this idea should have at least a basic understanding of memes and egregores in Mage (see Mage 20, p. 515, pp. 581-582, p. 594, and pp. 598-599), with IT and the Reality Hacking practice playing major roles in the scenario. A savvy Storyteller could craft a grand satire of computer and media culture from this idea; Basilisk, after all, embodies the self-destructive aspects of



social media and human imagination, and provides absurdist commentary on the uses we put them to.

The silver bullet for this hungry god might lay within the players' reach: Conceptual Entropy (as mentioned earlier, see How Do You DO That? pp. 134-136) could purge Basilisk before its power becomes too great to stop. Such a feat would demand a major ritual, *lots* of successes, and every resource the heroes can assemble toward that end. Basilisk, by this point, is far too vast to be dispelled by some bunch of arrogant humans, and any sort of victory will cost the heroes dearly. Still, unlike the previous scenario, there's a chance your players might succeed. That effort, though, will demand everything your players and their mages have to give.

#### Spitting from the Heart of Hell

It's all over. Earth has Fallen. Titans walk. Cities burn, Realms have perished, hope is gone, and the last remnants of Awakened humanity put their backs against the wall, determined to go down fighting.

This metaplot unites mages of all kinds in a Hot Gates suicide run. Victory is not an option here, just dramatic roleplay and a chance for awesome deaths. Technocrats, Tradition mages, Disparates, orphans, Marauders, maybe even some crossover characters from Vampire, Werewolf, or other World of Darkness games all gather for their final stand. Last words get spoken, romance might flare, old grudges get washed away in blood. Everybody dies, but you have a great time doing it.

For this option, the Storyteller sets a damn fine table, and then keeps the action moving fast. Atmosphere is paramount, and The Memorable Set Piece (see Mage 20, p. 361) shall be the whole of the law. Each player must come to the table knowing their characters won't walk away from it but ready to stage as grand a death as possible. Prior connections between those characters will make for a dramatic tale, and the more personal their interactions (say, the Black Suit who bears scars from the claws of the werewolf at her side), the wilder that last stand will be.

Unless there's a Fallen mage or two among the heroes, perhaps seeking redemption before his inevitable end, the Nephandi in this case provide backdrop and a great death scene. The real spark in this scenario comes from the heroes facing the heart of hell with brave smiles, tears, a brace of comrades at their sides, standing tall against extinction with the knowledge that when the final curtain falls they'll make memories that defy the Void.

AUTHOR'S AFTERWORD

# Not on My Watch

Nothing is as awful as the deeds carried out in this world by those who are normally referred to as humans.

- Keinen, Chosen Nichinichi ki

Within the 30 years of my professional writing career, this book may have been my hardest project ever. Not because it was difficult to find the words — it wasn't — but because of the rocks I had to turn over and the things I had to face beneath them.

It's easy to turn away from such things. I can't, though, and I hope you don't either.

I wish I could say this **Book of the Fallen** is an exaggeration. It's not. Every element within the preceding book, save the outright supernatural aspects, has been drawn from real life. Slavery, terrorism, fashionable sociopathy, state-sponsored torture, corporate abuses, sexual exploitation... all of it is absolutely true. In terms of sheer human foulness, this World of Darkness is our own.

So, what can you do about it?

Open your eyes. See what's going on. Don't let yourself get played by the real-life monsters of our world. And if you get the chance, which you often will, don't become one of them yourself.

As I've often said, a monster is a warning: an omen of what *might be*, and a revelation of what quite often *is*. This book of monstrosities is intended to rip down the curtains behind which horrors hide themselves. As I mentioned in the Preface, these horrors often live right next door to us, sometimes even in our homes and hearts. See them. Resist them. Rise above them. I have. You can.

Our world is stranger and more horrible than any fiction we can conceive. Humanity has always lived in a state of crisis, but today's world might present the biggest challenge our species has ever faced. **Mage** is about empowerment — the power to change your world for good and ill. And although some monsters are too big for us to face alone, you don't need Forces and Prime to call your local representative or spot someone who might be in trouble next door. You just need to see what changes you can make to the situation, and then to act on them.

Real life isn't nearly as satisfying as a game. We can't blast globalized fascism or clear up the U.S. Congress with a few well-placed spells. But we can watch for abusive relationships. We can speak up when we see injustice. We can refuse to go along with the crowd when they're pushing us toward the cliff. Some folks won't like that. Forget them. You can be better than the monster in the mirror, and the first and most important step of that victory involves seeing the bastard and telling him "no."

My friend Randi once literally saved my life from a mob that *would* have hurt me and might even have killed me. Years later, she said: "I didn't realize until that moment just how close real evil was, or how innocent it looks until you see what it might do. That night, and ever since then, I've told myself, 'Not on my watch.'"

Not on my watch.

Refuse. Resist. Stand up. Speak out.

Check yourself for monstrous behavior. When you see it — and occasionally you will — knock that shit off. You can be better than that.

It is up to us, to human beings, to be kind, and just, and compassionate. Because the universe is not. The choice to do evil, or to stop evil, belongs to us.

You could change a life. You might save one, too. If nothing else, when the big game ends and you level up to whatever waits beyond this life, you'll know then that you did what you could do to make a dark world just a little bit brighter.

And really – what better form of magick could you need, and what better hero could you become?

I believe in you.

- Satyros Phil Brucato, 2019

It's chaos. Be kind.

— Michelle McNamara, quoted by Patton Oswalt

